

THE DAY
BEFORE YESTERDAY

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PREFACE

The war began inconspicuously, insidiously, and we cannot say of any day or year that that was when it started. Some would put the beginning in 1933, some earlier. Curiously enough one of the first people in England to see what was coming was not a statesman or political writer or recognised student of affairs, but a painter and rather fantastical writer—Wyndham Lewis—who wrote a book called *Hitler*, published in 1931, warning the world that something very considerable was happening and about to happen in Germany. Certainly then there were a few indistinct pointers which might have shown that we were entering upon the first stage of war, the stage in which warring “ideas” are recognised for what they are and advertise themselves as ideologies. That, the first Act, ended in 1939 ; and since every Tragedy requires a beginning, a middle, and an end, we recognise that the Cease-fire was only the curtain of the second Act, whose sequel, as it opens, sets us wondering. The third Act, as I write to-day, is in its first scene. We are commenting on the phenomenon of the atomic bomb.

I think the seeds had already begun to germinate in men’s minds at the time when the first of these editorial notes were published in October 1934, though the sprouts had scarcely thrust upwards into the open air. Written from month to month in *The London Mercury*, they were not concerned with political events, and were not intended to have anything to do with wars or rumours of war. In 1934 it might have been supposed that we were living in a time of profound peace, and our concern in *The London Mercury* was to deal with literature and the arts and all kindred questions

which touch the life of the mind or kindle the imagination. They turned upon events which were important enough in their day—a new book, a new play, a new picture show, a new housing plan—pronouncements at a Royal Academy Banquet or a Congress of International Writers for the Defence of Culture—the Abdication—the Coronation—a dispute over the nationality of Covent Garden performers—challenges to the younger poets or the proletarian novelists—a scandal of censorship—a splendid or shocking example of the relations between politics and literature. It is difficult to project ourselves back into those days when things seemed big to us that now seem trivial or had values which we have been too busy to remember; but we do remember that a change was coming over the scene and penetrating our thoughts, disturbing our philosophy, re-shaping the current poetry, and even awakening a few politicians from their dogmatic slumbers. The old way of thought was gradually giving way to another under the impact of certain events, certain ideas, certain ugly, ominous things that evoked moments of fear or at least anxious curiosity. Something was felt to have happened or to be about to happen; some evil presence lurked darkly in the background affecting the very roots of conduct—there was the actual knowledge, for example, that concentration camps existed, and that no one was seriously protesting.

And the change that was perceptible in England was taking place all over the continent of Europe. On a visit to Greece in 1937 I noted that people there were talking about the same set of facts as we were discussing in England—"the British throne, the war in Spain, the fear of war in general, the trade revival, economic nationalism, fascism and anti-fascism, and also film stars, aeroplanes, radio. They have their eyes on Hitler, Mussolini, Blum, Neville Chamberlain, Roosevelt, Henry Ford, and one or two luminaries of Hollywood. All desire peace—peace first—better trade, fewer taxes, and more pleasures". And I noted that "all, as in England, are profoundly concerned about foreign affairs and matters of common European in-

terest—that is to say, they are thinking internationally as never before". And yet even then it was impossible not to observe that though "at the first glance internationalism seems to have taken us most of the way along the same road . . . we find ourselves up against certain incompatibilities of habit and tradition, which become insuperable obstacles to understanding when the Press is not free and the more enlightened minds cannot exert their proper influence". It is a peculiar pleasure for me to recall now what at the time it was a pleasure to state—that "in Greece, it seems to me, one finds oneself in an atmosphere where the intellectual and social barriers are less formidable than in many countries nearer to us".

Often in those days I used to see young George Steer, who, one might have known, was loved of the gods and not destined for a long life. He died in Burma, carrying on the work he had begun with Wingate. War was his speciality. Wherever anything warlike was stirring he was to be found, with a note-book and a revolver in his pocket and a quip on his tongue. Of course he was in Abyssinia, in Spain and from time to time in Germany, writing articles and books some of which were as remarkable for a firm mastery of a multitude of facts as for his clear enunciation of principles and muscular style. When, early in 1937, I said to him, "Will there be war?" he replied, "War? of course there will be". For him there was simply no possibility of doubt. And I think he not only knew that all the ingredients of war were already present, but that war had begun, and that he was participating in the first rounds—on battle-fields and in brandishing ideas. Steer was one of the warriors in the battle which, in 1937, was already joined.

Turning back, in an idle moment, to these *Mercuy* articles, it seemed to me that they might serve to recall something of the changing atmosphere in the years immediately before the war, and to indicate in one way and another some aspects of the transition from the old normal round of life that we thought of as civilized to the abnormal which clutched us and held us so long—and still holds us. We

P R E F A C E

shall never go back to what we knew before. "You cannot step twice into the same river"—though one may sometimes feel that one has been there before. Here are some of the things which one was recording and thinking about as one stood on the edge, watching the flow, the little whulls and eddies, the flotsam and jetsam that were cast ashore or carried on by the current. One was preoccupied, as one always is, with the present, but occasionally aware of it as the prelude to Acts in a drama of which we were about to be spectators. Looking back to 1935 or 1936, when we were amusing ourselves with a number of things, we feel we ought to have known what was coming; but in 1937 and 1938 we were not quite so ignorant, or if we were we had no excuse.

To-day there will be no picking up the threads which we dropped then. We have been burning some bonfires, and over the charred remains we shall go on to other things and survey a different scene and read new books, by new authors, about new men and women—if indeed there is any new thing under the sun. While the distant past is ever-present, the near past, being the most obvious enemy of the new, is always under a cloud and subject in the nature of things to derision; hearsay stabs its uncomfortable memories. But perhaps, if only to chasten ourselves, we shall not wish to sponge it all away; we may not wish to shirk the pre-war guilt of having been alive. This book contains some impressions of that near past, and some reflections arising from them, set down at the moment when it was still present.

1934

OCTOBER

It was in the year immediately following the war, at a moment supposed to be full of promise for literary enterprise, that Sir John (then Mr.) Squire founded *The London Mercury*. At last, it was supposed, authors would have the leisure to write and the public be disposed to listen to words that were written to give pleasure and to interpret the life of the time imaginatively. As a monthly magazine devoted to original literature and criticism of the arts *The London Mercury* was designed to fill a place that had from the nature of the case been left vacant during the war. I might add that during the whole of English literary history that place had seldom been adequately filled, and never for long. Early in the last century the *London Magazine*, to which Leigh Hunt, Lamb, Hazlitt, De Quincey and Keats were contributors, lasted only nine years. Early in the present century *The English Review*, as edited with so much fineness and gallantry by Ford Madox Ford (then known as Ford Madox Hueffer) lasted for little more than a year, though it was carried on with distinction and success by Austin Harrison till the beginning of the war; it was not Harrison's fault that in the remaining years of his editorship it languished.

So that place was conspicuously vacant in 1919, and Sir John Squire, with a band of poets, story-writers and critics in attendance, moved in—to stay. Fifteen years is something more than a sojourn, being half a generation as the genealogists reckon, and two generations (according to the newest estimates) in literature. It goes without saying that in the endeavour to establish itself as a literary magazine the *Mercury* has had its tribulations. But it has survived

them. Here it is, with what signs of life I must leave it to readers to judge. And now that Sir John Squire has decided to withdraw from the editorial fray and devote himself more exclusively to writing work, he takes with him—though perhaps it is absurd to go through the form of telling him what he knows so well—the affectionate good wishes of innumerable friends and admirers.

If anyone asks what I mean by two generations in fifteen years I would refer him to a young writer (a contributor to the present number of *The London Mercury*) who was talking to me recently about a past literary period which he was old enough to remember—it extended from 1919 to about 1926. He was alluding to it as an older man might to the Edwardian, or a still older man to the Victorian age—as a time interesting to remember, but irrevocably gone, in its characteristics utterly and obviously removed from all that is stirring to-day; an out-worn phase of the Time-spirit, a link—no more—in the historic chain. It might be looked back upon rebelliously or with detachment (according to temperament). It might be studied with reverence or amusement. The point was that its movement and life are not the movement and life of the young geniuses who are now on the verge of conquering the world, and who will hold the fort, I suppose, till it is their turn to be displaced six or seven years hence. 1934 nods aloofly to 1924, and looks back with adolescent indulgence on that post-war, middle-neo-Georgian period, which ended, shall we say, in the year of the General Strike, or perhaps just lasted to that transition moment when the war-writers emerged suddenly from their reveries in No-Man's Land, were devoured by the reading public, and were then disgorged and done with. A new period has been in existence for several years, and some of us are only just beginning to notice it. Straining our eyes towards the dawning generation with the reverence which the present accords rather to the future than the past, we confess our sins, like the pilgrim catching sight of the sacred peak of Kailasa, and perform to it the obeisance of one hundred and eight bows.

But I do not think it is peculiarly necessary, at this time of day, to stress the importance of being alert in looking for the new idea that is striving for utterance, and is destined to shape the intellectual or imaginative progress of the future. That is a matter of course. Obviously we must be heedful of originative movements, if we are to remain alive; obviously we must be on the look-out for the "new thing". But what matters is to be able to distinguish the genuine "new thing" from mere novelty. "Pursuit of novelty in thought", said a sage of the third century A.D., "has become an orgy in which the present generation revels". The pursuit is amusing, but it is, in fact, a very old-fashioned game, and it has always the disadvantage that it may put us off the true scent; we may double on our tracks and lose ground, and find ourselves pouncing on a quarry that was démodé forty years ago. But if we are steering our course wisely in the search, say, for new literature, and discover qualities which show "promise and specific symptoms of poetic power"—such as Coleridge detected in the early works of Shakespeare, in *Venus and Adonis*, and *Lucrece*—then indeed we shall be achieving something. But even so we shall be in error if we prefer *Lucrece* and *Venus and Adonis* to *Hamlet* and *Lear*, and extol Shakespeare the boy above Shakespeare the man. Promise is exhilarating, but only because it foreshadows accomplishment. It is accomplishment, and nothing but accomplishment, which in the long run justifies anything in literature. It is only by what is actually achieved that the reader will be pleased, the critic satisfied or the publicist excused. And the conclusion that we must abide by this decisive result cuts both ways, for it rules out at one and the same time the young charlatan who is too clever by half and the old charlatan who trades on a reputation which he never deserved, or, having deserved it, still pretends to possess what he has lost.

The London Mercury, I hope, will be fortunate enough to retain the services of the wise and experienced elders and to enlist those of men who are trying to blaze new trails. I cannot believe that the two groups, if grouped they must be,

are, by virtue of that accident of age alone, in any real sense opposed, assuming that their respective members are neither decayed nor fraudulent. What matters most, it seems to me, is that the people who are interested in ideas about life and in the pleasing shapes which the vital idea loves to assume, and in the preservation or adaptation in this utilitarian world of what is congenial to the spirit, and comely, or robustly self-dependent, should stand together so far as they reasonably can, and without excessive intellectual or temperamental strain. There are not too many of them of any generation or age. They may have been born to rebel against Victorian parents, or to vibrate in youth with the moral fervour of liberating Edwardian prophets, or to smile with the epicureans of the middle-Georgian period, or to frown to-day with the severity of twenty-one upon the flippancy of twenty-seven. What matters mainly is the possession of what Hazlitt called gusto—and that presupposes enough intellectual industry to provide taste with fit material to feed it. There is gusto, to be sure, in the writings of that magnificent veteran, Mr. H. W. Nevinson, whose *In The Dark Backward* is among the very best books of this year and one of the best books written by Mr. Nevinson. And *The London Mercury* will account itself fortunate if it can extract something more from the ever-exquisite Mr. Max Beerbohm. And there is gusto, belonging, I believe, to the same essential order of things—however different in individual type—in the poems of young Mr. Spender and the essays and poems of Mr. Michael Roberts.

If a *London Mercury* was needed in 1919, when men and women were wanting to think about something different from war and politics, so a journal or many journals, similarly disinterested, are needed to-day, when the world is in danger of thinking about nothing but economics. I am not decrying economics, or the importance of the place that economics is beginning to take in University education. But I cannot think it desirable that most of the intellectual energy of the nation should be given up—as to-day it does tend to be given up—to consideration of the bare bones of

the "economic crisis", or the problems of nationalism and prospective war. I admit that no intelligent human being to-day can or probably ought—I dislike imperatives—to turn his back on these matters. They and their like are insistent and pervasive, and inevitably so. And that being the case, those who are interested in literature, art, architecture, music and choice ideas of any kind, and believe that the past is worth remembering and the future worth moulding in forms congenial to selective minds, must themselves, if they would survive, go out into the practical world and make their wills effective. Thus, while *The London Mercury* will continue to be interested in the accepted problems of literature and the arts, it cannot be content with that. It must also turn to some of the practical matters which either are the objects of taste, or mould it—which stimulate in our minds the impressions which are our conscious life and stuff for the artist to handle. We cannot afford to be indifferent to

unquiet things

Which stir too strongly the soul's secret springs

whether they proceed from sophists, bards, or statesmen. Nor can we be indifferent to the manner in which the next generation is being instructed at school, or to the rightness and wrongness, as we conceive it, of the reconstruction of the towns and country which we inhabit. It will be our job to provide entertainment, and possibly even a little instruction, for men and women of taste, and also to remember that taste is affected not only by books and *objets d'art*, but by much else in life. And since there never was a time when those things which are valued by persons of taste were in so much jeopardy as to-day, it seems that *The London Mercury* should, as the occasion demands, widen its scope to admit of the discussion of such matters

exist. She was what she was when she expressed the mind of the majority of middle-class persons of middle age. When playwrights and critics inveighed against the censor of plays they gave all sorts of reasons for objecting to him, but their real reason was that they disliked Mrs. Grundy; they knew her as an enemy of the arts. She stood for the *status quo*, in morality, in art and everything else, whereas enterprising writers in a changing age are, obviously, never content with the *status quo*. Mrs. Grundy naturally wanted to protect herself against disturbing influences like Ibsen, Shaw or even the milder Maeterlinck; and set up a censor to suppress them. She had no objection to the broad badinage of the music-hall (to which ladies did not go), nor to the tepid obscenities of the musical comedy, which had the sanction of custom. But she did protest against the impropriety of ideas which were not her own. And that was only to be expected, since they threatened her existence.

Her fears were well grounded. Her enemies had no mercy. They killed her. She exists only as a memory kept green by the apologetic praise of her surviving relations and the taunts of her murderers. The Lord Chamberlain no longer acts in her name; he appoints a committee of enlightened gentlemen to give advice in such a manner that the censor may protect rather than coerce managers and playwrights. The British Board of Film Censors is somewhat more squeamish, but its action is directed to safeguarding the trade in its relations with the licensing authorities; and the latter in their turn are probably thinking less about the middle-class conscience than about the social effects of films on the young and uneducated.

And in like manner, when the Libraries Committee of the Westminster Corporation suggests that a Board of Book Censors should be set up to eliminate indecent novels it is not, I imagine, attempting to protect society against revolutionary ideas, but only to protect crowds of very young or ignorant novel readers whose slight mental equipment gives them no power to choose their reading with any real freedom. This is not the old problem of the censorship against which

Shaw used to fight. It is quite a different problem. Have library committees, we are now asking, or have they not any duty in regard to the character of the books they lend to millions of avid young adventurers who consume print with inextinguishable but undiscriminating ardour between office hours, in the bus going home, or whilst they bolt their food in tea-shops?

It would be a bold thing to say that they have no such duty. As purveyors of literature to the masses it would be difficult not to hold them responsible if they knowingly provided garbage—though I do not see why garbage should be considered only in moral terms, since books with aesthetic defects may surely do irreparable damage to the aesthetic sensibility; and even that, I presume, may be held to be of some value. But supposing we admit—and I think we ought to admit—that librarians should do all they can to prevent the dissemination of garbage (and for the moment we may confine our attention to the moral issue), does it follow that it is wise to set up a Board of Censors? Should individual library committees abrogate their function of choice and accept the decision of an omniscient Board?

I can conceive few things more damaging to literature than that a censorship of such a kind should be attempted. (I say attempted; for I do not believe it could succeed; it would lead to a revolt.) It does not matter how competent such a Board might be, or how clever its members in estimating literary or moral excellence, or whether they were appointed by librarians, or publishers, or authors, or the Home Secretary, the objection is that their opinion, governing the fate of books, would be a single arbitrary opinion; it would tend towards fixity as opposed to elasticity in the ideas which are granted publicity; it would not even, presumably, afford an injured writer the opportunity of a fair hearing and a trial. It might be a benevolent Censorship, but it would be just as much a tyranny as that which is exercised by Dr. Goebbels. The Nazis, too, claim to act in the best interests of the community.

Librarians have all the powers they need in their own

hands. They can select books; they can reject, and in exercising their choice they or their library committees are performing all the functions which could usefully be performed by an official censor—with this immense difference, that each library committee can only take action for its own libraries, and any error of judgment is limited in its effect. It has no power to make or mar the fortunes of a book, or decide what the public as a whole shall be allowed to read. If any librarian is in doubt as to how to exercise his choice, is it not open to him to study the best reviews in such journals as he may be disposed to trust?

From that subject I turn to another which is not far remote from it—the address which Sir John Simon recently gave to doctors and medical students on Culture and Specialisation. When one speaks, as Sir John Simon did, and most of us are occasionally inclined to do, of the “duty” of serious reading, it is well to remind ourselves of a difficulty which attends any effort to promote the arts—that the moment you handle them with extreme solemnity their joyous character and essential quality are apt to vanish. Sir John Simon quoted a story told by the late Lord Grey about a house-party arranged by the former Mr. Auberon Herbert, who greeted each of his friends as they arrived with the words: “Now, what are you going to do? *We are reading*”. The situation must have been formidable. The hint, for all its delicacy, must have had almost the force of a command, and one pictures each guest choosing, a little self-consciously, but without, of course, the least ostentation, the appropriate book and withdrawing to the seclusion of his room; and the possible scandal that might have arisen had such a one, say, as Mr. W. B. Yeats been among the party, and selected for his self-improvement a detective story.

However, it was pleasant to find Sir John Simon posing for himself and his audience this problem: How are we all, in the busy lives which we are preparing, going to keep

fresh some other interest of a literary or artistic kind, beside the main object and duty of our daily round—what the Greeks would have called a *πάρεργον*. Here was a case, obviously, when a cobbler should not be asked to stick to his last. It is not always instructive to hear admirals or bishops at a Royal Academy Banquet discoursing on art; but it is peculiarly interesting to hear how a politician, having started professional life with an equipment which might very well have launched him into writing rather than into the bar or politics, has succeeded in keeping a living interest in literature.

There are probably not many politicians who succeed in this, for politics is a very absorbing affair which eats into leisure moments and is apt—in this country more than elsewhere—to submerge an interest in the arts, and even, perhaps, to blunt a literary sensibility which may once have been keen. Of course there are exceptions, but even the exceptions seem to be fewer to-day than once they were. There are not many living statesmen like Bryce (who was interested in history), or Haldane (in philosophy), or Balfour (in the lighter aspects of æsthetics), or Curzon (in artistic monuments)—and even among these I am not aware that any ever used his influence in a Cabinet to induce it to encourage a National Theatre or a National Opera, or to pay adequate attention to the preservation and use of the hundreds of millions of pounds' worth of treasures in national museums and art galleries, or to assist literature, or to pay pensions to distinguished authors and artists comparable with those paid to distinguished soldiers and sailors. No statesman in this country during the last half-century ever attempted to persuade a government or party to go to the country on a programme which gave any serious place to any proposal made in the interests of culture.

The practice of politics appears to produce, or at least tends to produce a state of mind which looks upon literature and the arts as luxuries meriting lip-service on ceremonial occasions but not more, instead of as necessities in the life of a civilised community. One cannot resist the suggestion

that the wise advice which Sir John gave to the medical students of the Westminster Hospital should be pressed again and again on his colleagues. And might he not begin by using his influence in support of the desired extension of hours at the British Museum, if only on the ground that it is sheer waste to lock up national property in books, and forgo part of the only dividend it can pay—its use by students?

An ingenious friend has been making a few simple calculations about books. (Having made them before the Prince of Wales drew his fanciful picture of van-loads of printed matter proceeding daily to Lambeth Palace for arch-episcopal censorship, he is able to deny plagiarism.) He concluded that if all the new books issued in the autumn publishing season (one copy of each) were laid end to end through London streets, the line would stretch along the whole route followed by the Lord Mayor's show between the Guildhall and the Law Courts. (I have not verified the calculation.)

No one thought of this simple device for bringing home to the Aldermen of the City of London the importance of the book trade. When I add the further estimate, that all the volumes likely to be sold during the autumn season, similarly laid end to end, would stretch from London to John o' Groats, it becomes obvious that the output of this industry deserves more statistical attention than it commonly receives. There are no figures for the tonnage, but even if there were, the importance of the business could not be estimated by weight alone. I scarcely credit the tale that there are some literary editors who, in selecting books for reviewers, determine their choice by bulk alone; though it is possible that some publishers believe this story about the literary editors, and that that is why they pad out their volumes till they have attained a standardized portliness

of appearance. Yet I observe that Mr. Chesterton's new book of essays is very small, and that Mrs. Virginia Woolf's "Walter Sickert—a Conversation" is so slender a pamphlet that it might altogether be overlooked if her name were not on the cover. The publishers of Mr. Lloyd George's Memoirs have done well in packing them, so far as they go at present, into four volumes. There are 2,439 pages.

Publishing, then, if not one of the basic national industries, like coal or cotton, is a very considerable industry, employing, directly or indirectly, the labour of authors, typists, publishers, publishers' readers, publicity agents and office staff, printers, paper-makers and binders, and, on the distribution side, travellers, booksellers, librarians, reviewers, organisers of Exhibitions which exhibit books and societies which recommend them, and others engaged professionally or unprofessionally in this intricate concern. It is an industry which has its depressed areas, and has suffered to some extent from the trade slump; but is now said to be reviving in spite of the fact that it receives no Protection from the Government, and that it has persistently refused to submit to any process of rationalisation.

Since there has been no rationalisation, over-lapping and over-production continue. Every publisher and every author would admit that too many books are published, and readers would suffer no noticeable loss if the numbers of books temptingly spread before their eyes in the Christmas season were reduced, say, by 80 per cent. At first sight it looks as if rationalisation would be sheer gain to everyone. The public, it seems, would be as well served if four out of five books were eliminated; the publishers' overhead costs would be reduced; each work on an average would have its sale multiplied by five; and the author could take five times as long to write his books and could try to make them five times as good. The tasks of reviewers, booksellers, librarians and readers would be simplified.

In theory this sounds well enough; and the perfectly planned State, with a perfectly planned publishing trade, would have to attempt something of this kind. But it

would not do. Such a Nazification of publishing would make it as difficult to get a first book published as a first play produced. It would occasionally lead to the suppression of a masterpiece. The representative character of the body of literature which appears in book form would disappear. That literature to-day, taken as a whole, completely or almost completely represents the sum-total of the thoughts, sentiments, attitudes, intellectual excogitations, aspirations and vapourings of the nation. It is a more adequate embodiment of the whole modern British mind and imaginative and emotional make-up than is to be found in the products of Parliament, Pulpit and daily Press, taken together or severally.

It is often assumed that it is the daily Press which is pre-eminently the mirror of the public mind. That is not so. The more serious daily Press makes no claim to cover the whole field of human experience, it makes no attempt, for example, to reveal intimately and from the inside those aspects of life which are dealt with, say, in poetry and fiction. The popular Press, though in some respects more intimate, is not more representative. It is in the main cast in a pattern, monotonous in its high colours, invented by a few powerful persons—the late Lord Northcliffe and Sir Arthur Pearson, and our contemporary Lord Beaverbrook and a few others—inventors with a few simple recipes for reducing the infinite variety of human experience to a few archetypal forms, this variety being ingeniously turned to startling sameness with the help of skilful journalists habituated to a certain view of what the public wants and trained to convey it in accordance with an established technique. The pioneers who laid down the moulds of popular journalism were not, of course, all wrong in their guesses about human nature; if they had not been partly right, they could not have gained their colossal success or had so many imitators. But that they were at least partly wrong is proved by the fact that the most unthinking reader instinctively recognises the newspaper manner as something *sui generis*—there is a self-dependent sphere of things to

which popular journalism belongs with its own habit of thought, its technique, its literary pyrotechnics; it is a sphere of ideas easily identifiable because it is so obviously different from the sentiment and language of the man-in-the-street. The latter may and does acquire a taste for this invented thing just as he has acquired a taste for Hollywood films, it presents to him a world of scenes and actions far remote from and unlike daily experience.

I agree that this unreality is itself part of the real make-up of the popular mind, and that to that extent the popular Press is "mirroring" something belonging to the mental composition of the nation. I also agree that the same or a similar unreality is voluminously represented in the literature that appears in book form, including some of the "best-sellers" that the Archbishop of Canterbury is so anxious to burn. But there is this great difference between book-publishing and the greater part of the daily Press—the latter is trustified and rationalised, the former is not. If the publishing trade were in the same manner trustified it would concentrate on the mass production of a few books which would have enormous sales, instead of many books each having small sales; and we should have exactly the same results in the sphere of book literature as we have now in popular journalism; it would be no more representative of all the mental activities of the nation than the *Daily Mail* and the *Daily Express* are to-day. I have heard it hinted that there are publishers who aspire to be the Northcliffes of literature, who with a nod of the head guarantee fame and fortune to the geniuses of their circle. I have no inspired information on this subject. On the whole, for writers as a whole, it seems better that publishers should muddle along as most of them do, knowing much about their authors and next to nothing about their markets and their prospective readers. At least as things are to-day we can take our choice, for better or worse, from these oddly assorted volumes that surge into the shops—here at least we have samples of every type of mind, every interest, works sincere and insincere, recondite and obvious, esoteric,

exoteric, normal, strange, subtle, crude—here we may choose history, philosophy, economics, travel, sociology, sport, romance, black magic, philately, butterfly-collecting and what you will. Here is the whole contemporary British mind laid bare in books ready for consumption or, at the least, for permanent storage in the British Museum.

This generalisation, perhaps, should be qualified. For all literature drops out what is dead in experience, and literature that survives is free from the half-dead. The least reflective person when he writes selects what is more vividly alive for his consciousness at the expense of the dead matter in the stream of sensation. Just as talk is what is picked out from the unselected continuum of ideas in the speaker's head, and as any writing is likely to be more selective than ordinary talk, so a book is likely to be more selective still; and the fastidious writer or reader is one who attempts to produce or admire a book in which only the quintessential remains. That, I suppose, is the main purpose of education in the true sense of the term, to develop a faculty for recognising and choosing the quintessential—that which is intrinsically satisfying in the slightest no less than in the most stupendous experience. Higher education in recent years has been made available for an ever-increasing number of persons in this country. Some of it may have been wasted; not all of it, surely. It would be an unnecessarily pessimistic view to assume that it has so utterly missed its aim as not to have produced, in tens of thousands of young men and women, an increased capacity to appreciate the ultimately satisfying in that field of experience to which literature and the arts belong.

If the less pessimistic view is right, there must be thousands of persons to-day making exacting demands upon literature where there were only hundreds twenty years ago. Edmund Gosse was one of those who liked to suppose that the literary public was very, very small. He said to me once that, in the period just before the war, the reading public—the readers of “serious” books—numbered in Britain no more than four hundred. I reminded him that in 1914

the latest novel of Joseph Conrad, whom he did not think of as a popular novelist, sold 20,000 copies. And what about his own best book, *Father and Son*? The fastidious public will, of course, always be small compared with the whole literate population; but I think every publisher knows that it has been much augmented in recent years. The raising of the average level of taste would not, of course, be enough; and it might even have the opposite effect of lowering the level of the best, as actually about forty years ago happened in America. But the problem of the publisher to-day is not the extent of the reading public. There are enough readers and purchasers for every good book, if only it could be introduced to just those to whom its qualities would commend it. Reviewers who make their appeal to discriminating readers may at least congratulate themselves that the proportion of such readers is increasing, in spite of the popular Press, and in spite of the Archbishop's burnable best-sellers.

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In a letter printed on a later page Mr. G. J. Kirk reproaches *The London Mercury* for allowing itself to become an "exercise ground" for certain younger poets and "halfling philosophers". He complains of their "half-formed thought", their "awkward cadences", their "jettisoning of beauty" to make room for ideas that could be better expressed in prose. And he goes on to say that so far from "bringing poetry back into the life of the common man by bringing the life of the common man back into poetry", they are writing stuff which the young working-men whom he knows—and he meets them every day—cannot make head or tail of. He hints that we have here examples of intellectual, and even social, snobbishness, which is not the less snobbishness because it sometimes chooses to dress itself up in Communist ideas.

These are serious charges, and I think they ought to receive more sympathetic attention than Mr. Kirk himself has given to those whom he is criticising. Mr. Kirk is writing frankly from the point of view of one whose tastes are those of yesterday, but there is nothing inherent in the passage of time and time's fashions which necessarily makes yesterday inferior to to-day. Experiment does not always lead off on a good trail; in art as in science it is often necessary to go back to the point of the false start, and begin again. Literary historians are prone to mark the moments when the human mind has seemed to turn itself over and find a new form of literary expression with the result that literature could never be quite the same again—the moments which produced Provençal poetry, Boccaccio, Chaucer, Elizabethan

drama, a secular prose style, the novel of character, free romantic poetry, realism, naturalism, humanism, expressionism and all the rest. But from the nature of the case they do not pay so much attention to the myriads of experiments and novelties, sought for the sake of novelty, which did nothing and led nowhere.

Every age has had literary fashions which were unprofitable and often nonsensical. Had one lived in the age of Lyly one might not have seemed very gullible if one had thought that Euphuism revealed the splendid possibilities of future literature. The fantastical writing of the Metaphysical poets in the time of Cowley was often not much more than a means of displaying the fertility of minds which could not bear to seem common. Every age has had its too-clever-by-half young men whose cleverness tended to lead the arts away from rather than into the main stream of evolution. And the problem is all the more difficult because often certain of the ablest men of their time have participated in some movement which was destined to lead nowhere. This was the case with the Pre-Raphaelites. The spirit of protest against current conventions was genuine. The combination of effort among the members of the Brotherhood had its advertising utility. The men themselves had talent. But Pre-Raphaelitism itself was a blind alley, and it was not by virtue of it that the works of the Pre-Raphaelites survived.

No critic, therefore, would deserve attention if he acclaimed a new movement merely because it was new and because it was directed by talented men. But neither could he command respect if he were not constantly expecting some new manifestation of the spirit of the age, and most of all in our day when not only does the world around us change so quickly, but the light of science has been turned even on to the obscurer processes of the mind. Never were there such exacting demands upon alertness on the one hand and level-headed judgment on the other—upon the power of discriminating between evidences of genius and rank charlatanism. Professors of Literature

who desire to jump with the times are no more immune from error—in presence of the unprecedented—than were some generals in the war whose strategy and tactics were learnt in the nineteenth century.

But a few things are certain. Painting could not be expected to stand still at the point to which Royal Academicians had brought it a quarter of a century ago; and poetry could not be expected to remain where the formal descendants of Keats and Wordsworth had left it. Emotions may remain the same through all the ages, but the ideas out of which emotions arise undergo a change in texture—gradually, or quickly, as the case may be, according to the experiences through which the human mind is passing. Ideas are apt to change more quickly than forms of expression. Writers are always wrestling with the problem of putting new wine into old bottles. The Wellses and the Galsworthys and the Shaws of twenty-five years ago were constantly worrying with new ideas about society and even about human nature, but they attempted no startling changes in the use and arrangement of language. But when the change went yet further and began to affect the inward-looking as well as the outward-looking mind, modifying its perceptions, the old bottles were strained to bursting-point. Something had to happen. Proust began to refine, Joyce to explode, and Mr. T. S. Eliot to experiment with ingeniously calculated word-processes.

And the process of experimentation has not stopped. It is in a new phase to-day. Its defiant manifestations are disturbing Mr. Kirk, who has traversed no more than half of a normal adult man's life, and his young working men who are wanting the beauty that was Keats. But does Mr. Kirk omit to remind them that if Keats were alive to-day his language could not be quite the language of a hundred years ago? Might he not even be using *The London Mercury* as an exercise-ground? Or ought we to exclude him, condemning his "youngster" as "a feverish attempt rather than a deed accomplished"?

But one remark that Mr. Kirk makes strikes home. He

hints that the poets whom he is reproaching are not so much Communist as aristocratic. The indignation which they feel may or may not be tinged with humanity, but it is principally directed against stupidity—the stupidity which entrusts the world not to planning minds, but to those who live among catchwords, half-digested ideas, sloppy sentiments, and the clichés of the popular newspapers. One must suppose that they are moved not by love of the crowd, but by contempt for the exuberant mass-emotions to which the language of popular fiction so glibly and loosely corresponds. Hence, possibly, in many cases, a sort of contrariness.

So much they scorn the crowd, that if the throng
By chance go right, they purposely go wrong

“I find it difficult to write poetry that is not difficult”, wrote a poet the other day—exposing himself to the obvious retort—“If you made it easy might it not be exposed as a platitude”?—and there is no sin which is so much feared, by the fashionables of to-day, as platitude.

Keats was by no means free from mawkishness. And mawkishness became positively the fashion in mid-Victorian poetry, as we may see by noting how the bent of Tennyson’s mind was changed for the worse by the contemporary influences which first affected him at Cambridge. (See his recently published early poems for evidences of the transition.) It is no small thing that poetry should be redeemed once and for all from the taint of mawkishness, and made robust and bony—even if it may seem to some to be becoming too bony. And as for its difficulty, Dr. Richards is certainly right in saying that what seems difficult to the uninitiated will become easy as the mind grows into its new circumstances. But to be very ready to account for novelties in literary expression by fundamental changes in the mode of human consciousness is perhaps to take ourselves a shade too seriously. It is possible to accustom ourselves to any jargon—the jargon of the football field or the Senior Common room. In the one case and the other it can be expressively used by and for those who know the ropes.

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It can be expressively used—or, of course, inexpressively. The former, when the writer has something to say.

Literary criticism would be in a bad way indeed if it were fixed in the tastes and habits of the world of three decades ago—even if it were true, as perhaps it is, that a majority of men and women are still spiritually housed in that distant, diminishing past.

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It is probable that the last article written by Clifford Sharp before his death was that which he contributed to the February number of *The London Mercury* in the form of a review of “Early Victorian England”. Towards the end of January he rang me up on the telephone to say that he had been ill, but had recovered and was able to complete the article. The result showed that even then, in writing, he had not lost his distinctive power of “attacking” a subject and giving it the cast of his remarkable commonsense. He was a writer on political and social subjects primarily, but he differed from most political writers in his capacity for stripping his theme of the conventionalities and presenting the bare commonsense of the matter with frankness and force. That is a very rare quality among political writers; when it occurs, it raises work at once towards the level of literature, which in its essence must always be individual, and never mob or gang expression. As Editor of *The New Statesman* Sharp was at his best in the middle period, before his health began to give way, and after he had been released from the somewhat exacting influence of the leaders of Fabianism.

Sharp was seldom under the tyranny of catch-words. He was, of course, a ceaseless advocate of the rights and freedom of the Press, but he would not have been taken in by the amazing perversions of the principle that have been sedulously cultivated in recent years. The right to express opinions freely is so important, the recent menace of censor-

ship in some countries so formidable, that one would not willingly utter a word that might be construed as a whittling down of the claims to free speech or free writing. But the devil can sometimes talk Scripture to his own purpose. Among the most specious advocates of freedom of speech and opinion to-day are those who use their mass-produced newspapers to foist their own opinions on the more credulous public.

The point has been admirably made in a letter which Lord Elton wrote to *The Times* the other day. I am not concerned with the rights or wrongs of the political question he alluded to, or the particular views of a popular paper which, as he pointed out, reported twelve speeches against the India Bill in the House of Commons debate and only one in its favour. The proprietor of that widely circulating paper and its attendant group of journals may have been right or wrong—that does not affect the more vital question, which Lord Elton thus expressed:

Is not the drying up . . . of its sources of political information a threat to the very existence of democracy—a threat against which the B.B.C. is an important, though as yet only a partial safeguard? Again, is it either right or expedient that any individual, however personally capable or upright he may be, should be able by mere money-power to purchase a control over a great nation's sources of information, a control which is so far-reaching and can be so arbitrarily employed?

Are not these questions, asks Lord Elton, as significant as any which have occupied the attention of Parliament during the last decade? Surely they are. Yet how can any solution of the problem be found as long as those who have the greatest interest in asserting the true doctrine of freedom of opinion meekly acquiesce in the false doctrine asserted by those who are cornering publicity? We have a case where one man controls a daily paper and a Sunday paper with vast circulations throughout Great Britain, a London evening paper and a chain of evening papers in the provinces. Has the expression "freedom of the Press" any

meaning when applied to such a prodigious combine? One man is free, certainly—the man who controls this amazing mechanism; he is free to dictate to it. But are the reporters free to give disinterested reports of speeches? Lord Elton says no. Are the political writers free? The opinions they utter are dictated. Are the editors themselves free? They are selected as capable administrators who will do what the Chief requires. Let journalists by all means continue to demand the freedom of the Press, but not be guilty of the craven assumption that the freedom of, say, Lord Rothermere or Lord Beaverbrook is the same thing as *their* freedom.

We find the same confusion of thought when we turn to the question of cinematograph films and censorship. I have been blamed for suggesting that some kind of censorship may be necessary—as if I were supporting the principle of censorship of art. But when we speak of the freedom of the films, whose freedom are we thinking of? The freedom of artists to express themselves? Or the freedom of a few men, who control studios at Hollywood and a chain of cinemas in America, to impose what pictures they like upon a docile British public?

Let us support as consistently and as vehemently as possible the real freedom—freedom to hold, express and circulate opinions if we are speakers or writers, and to communicate imaginative conceptions of life as best we may if we are artists—and this without let or hindrance so long as we keep within the bounds that citizenship imposes. But this has nothing whatever to do with the freedom of a few monopolists who control the mechanism of communication. Happily there still exist some daily papers and Sunday papers, as well as weekly reviews, monthly magazines and book publishing houses, which are still, in this country, the media for free individual expression of ideas. Thanks to this leaven, the mass-producers have not everything their own way. But they have their way to a dangerous extent, and their influence on a credulous and ignorant public, which at any moment may be exercised in a capricious and

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arbitrary manner, is not consistent with real democracy. I am not at the moment attempting to offer any solution of Lord Elton's problem, but I do suggest that in approaching it we should, at least, disabuse our minds of the idea that a defence of these monopolies is a defence of freedom.

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The passions aroused by the dispute about Covent Garden have subsided. It all arose, it appears, out of a misunderstanding, but it led to a sharp little controversy as to whether the personnel employed during the opera season should be all-British, or partly foreign, and whether the State ought to intervene. The public were led to suspect danger of a grave scandal when no fewer than 158 Members of Parliament felt it their duty to address an indignant letter to *The Times* protesting against the supposed exclusion of British artists from this year's Opera. But there was no scandal—except that 158 M.P.s should so lightly lend their signatures to an erroneous assumption. The proportion of British artists, it was shown, will be not less this year than last, when 29 of the principal performers were British and 56 foreign, and of the remainder 309 were British and 6 foreign.

It would not be worth while to say anything more about the matter had not the writers used threatening words, which could only have been justified if they were fully satisfied that something very wrong was contemplated. They suggested that the Minister of Labour might be called upon to refuse the necessary permission for foreign artists to enter this country. Though their letter did not go so far as to demand that the personnel at the performances should be all-British, this was the interpretation put upon it and backed in some quarters. The Government was to be asked to intervene. The claim advanced virtually amounted to this, that a Government has and should exercise the right to fix the character of a great musical and dramatic festival

which it does not even subsidise; that it should be prepared to impose limitations which would tend to cut off British culture from foreign influences and make it self-sufficing and insular. We were, in effect, invited to put music in the same category as beef, butter and eggs, with a Music-marketing Board to regulate the home-producers of musical noises.

It should hardly be necessary, one might have thought, to urge the case for inviting to Covent Garden the best vocalists who can be secured, both from this and other countries. If British Grand Opera had the same traditions as British drama there might be much to be said for an all-British festival; then there might be, perhaps, a permanent British Operatic company, just as, soon, we may hope to have a permanent National Theatre Company, employing only British artists. But there is no tradition of British Grand Opera. Covent Garden has always been the scene of an assemblage of the most distinguished artists of the world, employed to render what has been held to be the best in European Opera—its unique orchestra, however, being predominantly British. It has been an exhibition of world art, as expressible through Grand Opera, annually held in the British capital—a bringing together of the best artists of all nations whose combined efforts will give the best possible in its kind. That, at least, is the ideal aimed at. This internationalism is of the essence of the Covent Garden tradition, and adherence to it, it is reasonably claimed, affords the best means of acclimatising Grand Opera on British soil, and inspiring the production of Grand Operas by British composers.

Rightly or wrongly, that is the character which the Covent Garden season has always had; that is the tradition; and with that is bound up its prestige. In these days, when in certain foreign countries art is in danger of being extinguished by a narrow nationalism supported by the authority of the State, one is right to protest against claims advanced on behalf of governments that they should attempt to alter the character of a festival such as that of Covent Garden,

or put a ban on its internationalism. It would be wrong, on the one hand, that British people should be deprived of the opportunity of hearing the best singers of the world, and on the other it would be harmful to British singers to expose them to the retaliatory action abroad which would certainly follow if foreigners were banned here.

It must not be supposed that this is a merely hypothetical question and that there is no real danger of serious interference. On several occasions in recent years the visit of some foreign actor or variety artist has been jeopardised or actually prevented by refusal of permits, on the ground that such visits deprive English workers of employment, though the artists themselves are well aware that interference of this kind is far more likely to stand in the way of their employment abroad. It is the concern of all persons who are interested in any art, whether it be music, or drama, or literature, or painting, to insist on the freest possible exchange between one country and another. Every art is likely to languish or die of stagnation if it is not constantly refreshed by the inpouring of ideas from the rest of the world. Western culture is a whole whose constituent parts sprang from the same origins in Greek and Roman antiquity and have shared the same historical development, and it cannot be split up into exclusive units without mutilation and disaster.

One reason why literature and especially poetry have flourished on English soil is that from the early Renaissance period and onwards there was easy access to foreign literature direct or through translations, so that the full effect of the revival of letters was felt here. And one reason why painting and the decorative arts lagged behind in Britain was that there was not the same coming and going of artists and craftsmen as there was between the Latin countries. Religious differences and the physical barrier of the Channel operated against the employment of foreign artists by English patrons, and English art suffered in consequence. If there had been more Holbeins and more Vandycks English native art would have been richer

Apart from the stimulation which arises by making contacts with the literature, drama, music and art of other countries, there is a further reason why at this time of all times there should be no barrier to intercourse. The sphere of ideas and of the creative imagination is the only sphere in which there is no excuse for exclusive nationalism. In proportion as the separating influence of economic nationalism is operative, the more urgent it becomes that thought and art, which admit no national borders, should remain free. They afford the surest hope of maintaining the essential unity of the western world. It was with this conviction that John Galsworthy sought to extend the influence of the P.E.N. Club with a view to promoting international amity; and when Galsworthy died, Mr. H. G. Wells, who might be expected to be a little more cynical about such means of promoting the World State, did not refuse to step into his shoes.

It was natural that another point should be raised in connection with this outcry about Covent Garden—namely, the question of entertainment tax. When Mr. Reginald McKenna first imposed this tax it was generally accepted that it was justifiable as a war-time luxury tax—a tax on pleasure graduated according to the means of the pleasure-seekers. But now it assumes a very different aspect. As a tax indiscriminately levied on films and dog-races, on drama and music, it has increased unemployment among actors and actresses, and hit hardest those forms of art which are concerned with imaginative ideas and which have at all times to struggle for existence. For some time the entertainment tax just turned the scale between profit and loss at the Stratford Memorial Theatre. It is a formidable item in a Covent Garden season. To all drama where living actors are presented it came disastrously at the critical moment when it was exposed to unequal competition with the mass production of the cinema.

The entertainment tax, so far as it affects drama and opera, is nothing less than a tax on ideas and on facilities for the exercise of the imagination. It is open to precisely the

same objections as those which were brought against the old "taxes on knowledge". It is an imposition as bad in its effects as the Stamp Act of 1712 which imposed a tax on newspapers. A hundred years ago there were three "taxes on knowledge"—the taxes on newspapers and advertisements, abolished in 1853, and the paper duty, abolished in 1861. Against these obstacles to the dissemination of news and ideas was thrown the whole weight of the British Press. The entertainment tax was a reversion to the same restrictive principle; but the case against it has seldom been clearly stated and never powerfully backed.

I have been inundated with letters from readers on the so-called "new schools of poetry", some congratulating *The London Mercury* for breaking away from the merely pretty, sentimental and imitative, others angrily denouncing the obscurity and uncouthness which the writers discover in the works of the younger poets. I am not surprised at the discomfort of those who, having long habituated themselves to a certain order of thought and feeling, now find themselves invited by the very young to go to school again. And, human nature being what it is, I suppose we ought not to be surprised at some lack of intellectual curiosity and sympathy among those who, being bewildered, lightly assume that the obscurities which occur are due to affectation only, or the desire to be clever at any cost. If that assumption were true, their indignation would be justified. For nothing is worse in literature than affectation, or cleverness at the expense of sense—unless, indeed, it be a closed mind against what is fresh and alive. But what are the facts? It is a fact that among the younger writers who appear to have anything to say there are few who find the older conventional verse-forms, which alone appeal to some of our correspondents, adequate for the expression of what they desire to express. It is easy to reply that they are the victims of a fashion. Some of them undoubtedly are. But even if it were no more than a fashion, it would still be our

business to recognise merit that is beneath it or breaks through it.

From fashions in literature moderate ability can never escape. But we are confronted with something more than a fashion. Literature, in so far as it is alive and worthy of the name, is always adjusting itself to the world in which its writers live. But those adjustments in the past have been gradual, since changes in the world were slower. It is a commonplace to say that the rate of change in the modern world outstrips the capacity of the human mind to adjust itself to its new conditions. Even the more obvious physical changes in our environment have an incalculable effect on the impressions which enter our minds and form the substance of daily life. The Britain through which we travel is a different Britain from that of thirty years ago. Wordsworth would scarcely recognise his Lake country. The towns have been transformed. Boys of twenty were born in a world of internal combustion engines and steering wheels, which meant nothing to their fathers when they were boys. To the latter war seemed as remote as the Middle Ages; to the former, it is to-morrow's prospect. Wireless and aeroplanes in the physical world, Jung and Freud in psychology, Fascism and Communism in politics, the slump in economics—all of these, though they may not have altered human nature, have profoundly modified the stuff of consciousness. The stream of sensations which pass through the minds of a modern man never entered the consciousness of the older poets. But from this stuff literature has to be made.

In handling it the poet is confronted with the same task as always—that of seeing his world as clearly as he can, and making it clear in his own mind, not only as thought, but as vision; he will not fruitfully rush into expression until he can illuminate a scene which before, in its disorderliness, was dark. But is it surprising that the modern poet, dealing with material which has never been poetically handled by any predecessor, working without examples in this kind before him, with no ready-made technique at his disposal, with no

models of tact in separating the worth-while from the not worth-while, should often flounder and err in taste, and become awkward, ugly and obscure? Unnecessary obscurity, now as always, is a vice. To be uncommunicative is to fail in expression. But literature would be stone-dead if those who were writing were not trying to grapple with the world as it is and to discern and convey its significance.

We might indeed despair of modern poets if they were content to reproduce "the beauty that was Keats". But they are not content with such banal and ineffective repetition. Experiment is not inspiration, but much experiment—and more to-day than at any time—is the condition of fruitful inspiration. True, it will not produce any results worth having if it is undertaken merely for the sake of novelty, or for any other reason whatever than to find the best vehicle for giving an account of our world, and for making it, not less intelligible, but more intelligible, characterising it, imaginatively defining it, and so simplifying it—since the order introduced by imaginative vision is always simpler than the raw material of which it is made. Many writers are content to serve up this raw material, untreated, unformed—and that can never be poetry. Others have forgotten that productive change does not imply a complete break with tradition; there can be no improvisation so brilliant that it can afford to discard the technique of past workers, and no language intelligible which is not built out of existing language. (The poets of one generation are prone to turn and rend those of the last; but the more critical can never ignore their indebtedness.) Others, again, are busily thinking and concerning themselves mainly with intellectual propositions about life. That process is interesting, but it does not, by itself, lead to poetry. "All the thinking in the world", said Goethe, "does not bring us to thought"; and thought does not lead to poetry until, as Coleridge said, it has become "habitual and intuitive".

There will be no lack of speciousness, humbug and fashion-mongering, and clever imitation prophets. But putting that aside, we are bound to recognise that all this

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thinking about the new world in and around us, this experimenting with the means of revealing its character and significance, are absolutely indispensable if culture is to do its work of grappling with contemporary life, not only explaining it scientifically, but revealing and transmuting it in terms of feeling and perception.

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At this stage in the proceedings it may be well to remind ourselves that the Jubilee is not a monopoly of the daily Press. Nor even of the daily and weekly Press combined. Students of the latter will have observed that Mr. E. F. Benson has produced a bookful of articles dealing with all aspects of the reign of King George from 1910 till our own time. I pause to notice that almost inadvertently I have used the words "our own time", which might be taken to mean that 1910 was quite another time; that the Georgian epoch is not one and indivisible; and that those who speak confidently for this part of the Georgian age may be worlds away from those who speak for its beginning.

But to turn from the periodical Press to books, it seems that many authors have sought topicality by, in a sense, avoiding it. To be up-to-date in 1935 they have gone back to 1910, and by various feats of intellectual gymnastics have endeavoured to treat all the intervening years as if they were simply "our period"—a period which we share loyally with His Majesty the King. This must seem an amazing piece of agility to those who belong to the newest schools—to those, say, who look upon Mr. T. S. Eliot as an interesting relic of the last generation. Whilst there are already fairly prominent persons for whom literature began in about 1928 or 1929, there are others, still prominent, for whom it ended in 1914; and there are yet others who have their eyes on the intermediate period and are convinced that the only important products of literature in the last sixty years came from Bloomsbury.

Now this is going to make it difficult to present a firm, clear-cut definition of "our" Georgian age. But that there are striking similarities as well as differences between the beginning and end of the period has been shown by Mr. H. C. Dent in the series of short extracts from newspapers and speeches which he has collected in *Milestones to the Silver Jubilee*. "At no time since the Great War", said *The Times* in 1912, alluding to the Napoleonic War, "have the signs of social uneasiness been so general in Britain as they are to-day". The signs have repeated themselves. In the year 1911, a certain Dean Inge is quoted as saying: "There is a soft and flabby side to modern humanitarianism". Social unease and Dean Inge were both topical at the opening of the reign, and remain topical. It is reported that a prophetic undergraduate, attending his lectures at Hertford College, Oxford, some thirty or forty years ago, carved on his desk the words "kill-ing no murder". Was he darkly hinting that there are Methuselahs with many lives against whom the critical assassin is powerless—whom no docketing of the generations will dispose of?

Both Mr. John Buchan (our future Governor-General of Canada), in his Jubilee book, *The King's Grace*, and Mr. Frank Swinnerton in *The Georgian Literary Scene* are aware of the disunity of the period. "No epoch in the life of a nation", says the former, "is exactly outlined by a sovereign's reign". And Mr. Swinnerton: "Authors are born very untidily. They do not live as they should do, from century to century, or from reign to reign, but rise as and when they will, and do their work unwinkingly regardless of the historian". Each of these authors, like Mr. Benson, writes with most gusto about the period nearest to that in which he was intellectually cradled. Whilst Mr. Benson's mind is apt to hark back to the reign of Victoria, Mr. Buchan's background is full of lively recollections of the Edwardian period; and Mr. Swinnerton's spiritual home is among the writers who flourished in the years immediately preceding the war.

It would be a mistake to turn either to Mr. Buchan or Mr. Swinnerton if we wanted a critical account of the

historical events or the literary personages of the last decade. Mr. Buchan skips those years—or at least dismisses them in a few pages—and Mr. Swinnerton frankly expresses dislike of all that part of the literary world which he elects to call “modn”. But each speaks as one having authority for the years 1910 to 1914. And that is a period particularly worthy of study for our purpose, because then the long process of transition from the old order to the new came to a head, and indeed became so outward and obvious in its manifestation as to involve the world not merely in a war of ideas, but in its crude consequence, a war with guns.

Mr. Buchan calls 1912 and 1913 “the restless years”. “In the retrospect they seem a period of continuous effervescence and ferment. Even at the time one was conscious of walking on unsubstantial ground”. Mr. Swinnerton in the same way speaks of the “unrest” of the age, and points out that the young, who “were all for seriousness”, were also “all for iconoclasm”. This was the period which witnessed the violent demonstrations of suffragettes, large-scale strikes, the arming of volunteers in Ireland, and chronic rudeness in the House of Commons; Signor Marinetti announced the arrival of “Futurism”; Mr. Wyndham Lewis proclaimed “Vorticism”; jazz music appeared; night-clubs became popular; and Austria declared War on Serbia.

Most of this appeared as no more than the froth on the surface of a cauldron that had been long simmering. If we began asking who first lit the fire beneath it we might have to go back to someone like Roger Bacon, or Galileo, or Rousseau, and note the faggots that were thrown on by Godwin or Shelley or Byron. Or if we asked who led the attack on the bourgeois conception of morality and letters, we might go back to Nietzsche, Ibsen and Walt Whitman; but it is enough to observe that shortly before 1910 the momentum of this attack had become prodigious under the leadership of Bernard Shaw and H. G. Wells, followed by John Galsworthy and a host of others. One talks of literature turning to propaganda to-day, but never was there a time when so many powerful men of letters, being

engrossed in the social problems of their age, became incorrigible propagandists as in the first decade of the century. There were essayists like Charles Masterman racking their souls in public over the social abuses of the age. There was Edward Carpenter. A writer with so pure a literary taste as H. W. Nevinson could not abstain from the espousal of democratic "causes". Even G. K. Chesterton, however light-hearted in his romanticism, was to be found in prose and verse passionately denouncing oppressors and humbugs. And there were others, like Arnold Bennett in England and Winston Churchill in America, who were so obsessed by the phenomena of swift social change that it became the dominant *motif* in their more important novels. Even Mr. E. M. Forster, than whom few writers could be more detached or less susceptible to gregarious habits of thought, became, in the years before the war, one of the prophets.

Intense seriousness and aggressive moral purpose were the most conspicuous notes in English literature in 1910, and it was not less serious even when it assumed the form of Shavian railillery or Chestertonian banter. Literature had been making a prolonged frontal attack on an older order of ideas and on outworn social habits, denouncing equally privilege, humbug and self-deception. But at the beginning of the Georgian period something suddenly went. Was it that the resisting forces crumpled up all along the line, that the attackers rushed the whole system of defences, and that for their successors nothing was left to do but to spread over the conquered country and enjoy the loot? Certain it is that somewhere about the years 1910 to 1914 the whole tone of the supposedly characteristic literature of the period altered. From fierce iconoclasm one turned, after an interval of mock violence and froth, to mild contempt of the surviving idolatries. Intense earnestness, after the same interval, gave place to flippancy. The ravings of the Delphic Oracle were silenced. The superior person, after a long absence, returned. Poets diverted their seriousness to the technique of making verses, and prose-writers remembered style.

And having said all that, we have to unsay it again—or some of it—for the facts of literary history aggravatingly get in the way of generalisations. The people whom Mr. Swinnerton's "modn" thinks of as the men of that age (1910), the "old gang"—"Shaw and Barker and Galsworthy in the theatre, Bennett and Wells and in a lesser degree Galsworthy in the novel, and Chesterton and Belloc in the Press", who made the young men of 1910 feel that "there was thrilling life in the intellectual world"—may have seemed, and may have been, the writers most expressive of the contemporary mood; but they were far, far from being all who were alive, active, and important just then. We can hardly leave Henry James out of the picture. It is evident that Mr. Swinnerton, who thinks of him as "the finest craftsman among Victorian novelists" and the "Grand Literary Panjandrum" of the early Georgian period, secretly dislikes him because he has something in common with the "modn"—his relationship being, surely, parental or at least avuncular. And what account are we to give of Joseph Conrad, who could never by any stretch of imagination be placed in the company of prophets and propagandists? And George Moore—where does he come in? Or W. H. Hudson, the quiet and scrupulously literary naturalist? Or Mr. Norman Douglas, putting his tongue out with exquisite audacity at the over-solemn people of all ages? And Mr. Max Beerbohm—"Well! for my own part, I am a dilettante, a *petit maître*. I love best in literature delicate and elaborate ingenuities of form and style. But my preference does not keep me from paying due homage to Titanic force!" With this as his text, Mr. Swinnerton has defeated himself by writing an appreciation, brilliant and just right, of the delectable, the one and only, Mr. Max Beerbohm.

Indeed, when we look into it, it appears that all those subtler literary excellences which we are apt to think of as incompatible with the first dozen years of the twentieth century were then actually present in a superlative degree.

JUNE 1935

Gossip has been busy about Colonel Lawrence (Aircraftman Shaw) for a dozen years, not about what he was doing but what he was *not* doing. Nobody seemed willing to believe that he was not either raising another revolt in some part of the Moslem world, or writing another earth-shaking book. We are so accustomed to politicians and writers who are always writers that we find it difficult to understand a man who does a thing once and, when it is done, does not think it necessary to shine by doing it again. Lawrence, no doubt, would have written well on any subject in which he was interested. But is it really so strange that a man should refrain from writing books when there is nothing he feels powerfully impelled to say, or more strange than, that men should go on writing when they have to rack their brains for a subject? Or why should we have expected him to go on raising revolts in deserts any more than we should expect a man who has saved a princess by stopping a runaway horse to spend his life in saving princesses or looking for runaway horses? The ordinary man, it is true, is apt to go on trying to repeat his triumphs. Lawrence, perhaps, was simply more rational than the ordinary man.

He is likely to become the classic example of that rare thing, the artist man-of-action. He brought the Arabs in on the side of the Allies in the War, influenced British strategy in Egypt and Palestine, and did much to determine the character of British policy in Arabia, Palestine and Iraq—and all this in consequence of his personal achievements among the Arab fighting men. The book in which he has told the story is justly spoken of as an epic of the English language; it is as forceful and sophisticated as Doughty and almost as simple as Homer. Every artist longs to be a man-of-action, but rarely is—though the history of the War is full of examples of men of poetic temperament who excelled as soldiers. Every statesman

who has reached the first rank has been a man of imagination and has possessed much of that intuitive faculty which is essential in the artist. Under ordinary circumstances Lawrence would never have had the patience to adapt himself to the conventions of political, diplomatic, or military life which must have been observed if success were to be attained in these spheres. Without the War and without the Arabs it is unlikely that he would ever have won great fame.

But the Arabs provided him with just the milieu he needed. Amongst them there was opportunity for that sort of sublime play-acting which he loved. Every scene that he describes might be a scene in a theatre. The story that he tells is packed with drama. The suspense rises and falls and rises again as the narrative proceeds. The persons who appear before us have the exaggerated speech and action of characters made for the stage. It will be said, and rightly, that much of this is due to the art of the narrator. It is, but he is a story-writer who has found the divinely right subject-matter.

But again, no mere artistry, no mere sense of these occasions, nor even perception of the right course to take, would have availed if he had not had the power to fascinate his Arab associates. He could do all that they could do and more. By will-power and self-discipline he was able to ride farther and longer on camel-back than they could; he could endure cold and fatigue which sapped their resolution. To imagination, intellect and common sense he was able to add physical accomplishment. Finally he was able to exploit to the utmost the fact that he had behind him all the prestige of Great Britain without feeling himself—in his dealings with the Arabs—fettered by the red-tape of civilised orthodoxy. Later, having finished his war-work, his war-settlement work, and his book, he withdrew into private life, and became, for what he had done, a legend, and for what he was not doing, an enigma.

The 13th of June will be the seventieth birthday of Mr. W. B. Yeats. The gift which a number of painters, sculptors, musicians and writers are planning for him will be no perfunctory tribute of admiration to a distinguished poet whom it is seemly to honour. As a poet and as a person he is acceptable and delightful equally to his contemporaries and to those who are half a century younger. He has entered into the poetic life of almost all living persons who care for poetry. The old remember him as a brilliant member of a group of young and promising men one or two of whom were making a synthesis of poetic elements drawn from Paris and Dublin. The middle-aged remember him as the protagonist in the Irish literary revival movement—which had Mr. Yeats, romanticist, on one side, Synge, tragic realist, on the other, and midway, Lady Gregory, holding the balance with common sense and humour. There was a moment when his talent drooped and his verse seemed in danger from the distraction of philosophic theory. But for a moment only. He went back again to the Elizabethans, took pleasure in the newest of the moderns, and himself went on writing with undiminished zest, worldly wisdom removing the old extravagances from his fancy and style without diminishing the feeling.

For English readers it has been all gain that Mr. Yeats writes in the English language and yet is not an Englishman. He has been near to us and yet remote. He has been much on English soil—in London, and at gatherings of London people—but he does not, as a person, belong here. His background, his raw material of legend and hagiology, have been Irish; his actual theatre was a Dublin theatre; and those whose side he would take, whose quarrels, if necessary, he would espouse, were Irish men and women; and there was nothing in his literary or social relationships which would make anyone on this side of the Channel want to cavil at him or estimate him in any way except as a writer, or, perhaps, as a man who had become a sort of legendary embodiment of that poetic spirit which demands always to be disembodied. Such a conception would have been less

just to him had it not implied a tribute of praise to genius. He was the ideal poet of our time, with all the trappings of the ideal poet, whom Englishmen could hardly have discovered in any mere Englishman with domestic traits revealing him all too palpably as a man of ordinary flesh and blood. Mr. Yeats has been able to remain our more than human poet—our poet from Ireland—yes, not less than that, even when searching, as I have seen him, for a lost umbrella.

In later years his poetry has become extraordinarily enriched by his experience of life and books. It has fallen to his lot to see the cultural movement of Sinn Fein with which he was identified turn into a bloody revolutionary movement. and gay members of his circle, like the Countess Markievicz, sent to prison—never has a literary man with so little revolutionary desire seen such a Frankenstein monster emerge from his efforts. But what we especially feel about his works now is, perhaps, the breadth of his intellectual interests. No young poet can ever give us, as he can, with energy still fresh, the sense of intimacy with the main aesthetic problems of the world from Homer and Plato to Shakespeare, to Blake, and down to our own time. His is the work of a poet who is conversant with the old and the new, the seriousness and absurdity of past and present, and writes as an adult who, though adult, has not forgotten youth. And now, in words apposite if not in his best poetic vein:

I have prepared my peace
With learned Italian things
And the proud stores of Greece,
Poet's imaginings
And memories of love,
Memories of the words of women,
All those things whereof
Man makes a superhuman
Mirror-resembling dream.

J U L Y 1935

Was it despair of the novel or high hopes for the future of the drama that inspired Dr. Mackail's speech at the annual supper of the Elizabethan Literary Society? There were signs, he said, that the drama was on its way to take its old place again, and that the novel would die of exhaustion. The latter was suffering from over-production; the small fraction of modern fiction that had merit was being out-crowded by the third and fourth-rate and no-rate-at-all work in which it was embedded and encrusted.

But fiction does not stand alone in respect of the fact that its best is always being squeezed if not squeezed out by the less good or the not-good of the same species. Drama itself is surely in just as bad a case. The unsophisticated populace is in a majority everywhere, and the theatre manager who must fill a house for a hundred performances is dependent on it as the publisher is not. The films, of course, are still more dependent on the crowd and the crowd-taste, and that is why more progress has not been made in developing fine forms of art out of the new hitherto undreamed-of opportunities offered by cinematography. But perhaps it is not so much the crowd itself which is to blame, but the rooted belief prevalent among mass-producers of all kinds—producers of plays, films and newspapers—that the populace is not to be trusted, and that it must be given what the caterers think it wants. The public taste is being perpetually kept down by the contempt in which it is held by the universal providers.

The number of novels produced every year continues to increase, but actually fiction is not suffering from mass-production as films are, or daily newspapers. *The Good Companions*, I suppose, or *The Fountain* might be said to be mass-produced; but such books are rare exceptions. The quantity of fiction consumed by the masses continues to increase; and the total number of hours devoted to its perusal in buses, trains and restaurants by young women

alone must run into billions of reader-hours per year. But thousands of different novels are constantly added to this stream, and the over-production complained of appears to lie in the large numbers of separate novels published rather than in the large total sold and read. The good and half-good and bad are always jostling against one another. Yet the sorting-out process takes place much more effectually—in the long run, if not always at once—than might be expected; and on the whole an infinite variety of tastes, from the consciously high-brow to the rudimentary popular, is provided for with more precision than is possible in the case of the really mass-produced films and newspapers.

But the fact that so many novels are being produced and so many read does not in itself seem to be a sign of exhaustion. Why does it suggest to Dr. Mackail that fiction is likely to die? And is it really the case, as he says, that drama in the seventeenth century came to grief as the result of over-production? Was not this result produced rather by a change in the circumstances of production, which afforded access to the theatre to the fashionable few and denied it to the many, so that drama tended to become an aristocratic art not nourished by any aristocratic tradition? It seems unimaginable that when the habit of reading has become universal, people reading as naturally as they talk, the written word should cease to be a favourite medium for appealing to the imagination and affording pleasure. Popular biographies may fill part of the place. Anthologies and travel books may become competitors with novels. It may even happen that the great public some day may be induced to read poetry, good and bad, as eagerly as it now reads fiction, good and bad. But it is unbelievable that in our time the novel, in spite of the competition of the cinema, the B.B.C. and other forms of literature, should die of exhaustion.

Yet it has to be admitted that very little fiction of the highest order has been produced in this country during the last ten years. It is just conceivable that those who take their art seriously may feel impatient with the novel as a

literary form, as painters do with representational painting; they may feel that all that can be done with plot and character has already been done, and that all the changes have been rung. On the other hand, in a book written about a dozen years ago (and many times reprinted) we find Mr. Percy Lubbock saying that the language of the novel gives a possible scope to the novelist so wide and so little explored that the novel may now be starting upon a fresh life. "There is still so much to be done, after a couple of centuries of novel-writing without a pause; there are unheard-of experiments to be made.

So just when it seemed that the novel had achieved as much as it was capable of achieving in respect of plot, description, character and thought, Mr. Lubbock came along and said that it was only beginning. Here was all the material ready to hand awaiting experiment by the author capable of refining upon the refinements of technique. The narrator who obtruded himself so egotistically in the works of Thackeray or Dickens or, for that matter, Meredith, will henceforward hide behind the scenes. He may withdraw, as the dramatist is bound to do in the theatre, to allow his persons to tell their own story, and reveal what is to be revealed by their mere behaviour. Thus Henry James in *The Awkward Age*, and Tchekhov in many of his short stories. It will be observed that this purely dramatic method gains rarefaction of atmosphere and fineness of edge by a deliberate sacrifice of powers that are at the disposal of the novelist and are lacking to the dramatist; it is not suitable for all purposes.

There is a wider range of opportunities for a writer who, setting himself at the viewpoint of a person in the novel, shows his or her world as Flaubert showed that of Madame Bovary. The writer may vary the method at will, showing now the tract of vision as it is for this or that character, and now this vision re-translated in the mind of a detached observer. If the main use of a novel is to enable us to live vicariously, then endless opportunities of experience are afforded when the novelist can annex a whole new world

by simply looking out through the eyes of this or that or another individual—as many worlds are at his disposal as there are people, supposing him to have the power of getting at the centre of the vision of each. For the reader the effect may be enhanced if the novelist is tactful enough to know when to drop the pedantry of a relentless technique, and to let an eavesdropper do some of the observing.

Mr. Walter de la Mare, who is incapable of pedantry, or of being the slave of his own technique, has done this admirably within a short story. In *Selina's Parable* we are taken with Selina to look with her out of the smallest little window in her house, so small that she can only see out of it with comfort by kneeling. Through the little window we see her farmyard, full of cocks and hens, ducks, doves, and a few predatory wildlings, and the farmer ponderously traversing the yard towards the granary “in his usual stout Alexander-Selkirkian fashion” (that Alexander-Selkirk touch is Mr. de la Mare’s, not Selina’s); and through the window we observe the feathered mob expectantly clustered outside the granary like an assemblage of humanity waiting to be admitted to a theatre. When the farmer emerges, empty-handed, and moves away leaving the door open behind him, we hear Selina sighing the happiest of sighs, and exclaiming “God bless me, they’ll go in and help themselves”. “Selina, transfixed there, in a felicity bordering upon rapture, watched”—they adventure in, the hens, the cocks, the ducks, the doves, the predatory wildlings, and emerge one by one, peevish, crestfallen, damped. Their god had deceived them. And Selina moralizes upon her farmyard life, and Mr. de la Mare stands behind Selina, and behind Mr. de la Mare are Gods innumerable ironically reviewing the world they have made.

This little story by Mr. de la Mare is interesting because it shows that it is possible to use the method of internal narration (with deliberate inexactitude) without being in the least recondite. Such a writer as Mrs. Virginia Woolf is likely to be more difficult; she is often content to record the movements in the mind which she is watching, not caring

JULY 1935

to give clues to the succession of impressions which she presents, because she demands of the reader to the full her own. demonic power of entering into possession of another mind.

But to say that the range and potentiality of the novel have been increased since Flaubert and Henry James gave it a new turn is not to say that the older kinds of novel are dead. At the moment the artistic world is suffering from the divorce of the intellectual from the common man, each moving in a separate plane, the latter being deprived of the taste and curiosity of the former, the former of the other's vitality and zest. We seem compelled to choose between crude force on the one hand and the ultra-refined on the other, and in some cases, where, as in Joyce, the effort has been made to combine the two, we get a hybrid which, however interesting, is not wholly satisfactory. There is some significance in the fact that the majority of the world which is neither sophisticated nor stupid still has recourse to such a writer as Mr. Wells, who despises the refinements of art, stands in the main line of the English tradition, and touches the vivid actual world at a thousand points; and may possibly in the future have a successor with some of his powers and free from some of his defects.

AUGUST 1935

Civil List pensions are awarded once a year. They are given for public services to men of letters, historians, theologians, artists, musicians and others, or their widows or orphans, regard being paid to their financial circumstances as well as to public services. It is reassuring to know that a grateful country comes to the assistance of A. or B. or C. "in recognition of his services to literature", "in recognition of his services to theology, history, poetry and literature", "in recognition of his public services to the natural and artistic amenities of the country," and gives him a pension in view of his need. Was it not in just this spirit that the great general who won the battle of Blenheim was given

£4,000 a year and half a million sterling for the erection of a suitable family seat, and that, more recently, certain generals in the Great War received gifts in recognition of their services?

It is to be expected, of course, that the nation would express its gratitude more munificently to a man who has done much towards saving its life than to a man of letters who cannot be presumed to have contributed more than a small quota towards saving its soul. And in any case we do not look for consistency in these matters. Our Prime Ministers, whatever their services or their needs, are seldom pensioned. Neither the late Lord Oxford nor his widow was given a suitable pension or the means for erecting a suitable family seat—a tribute that might well have been paid to a man far from rich who was for nine years at the head of the State and left office poorer than he entered it. But that is another question. Enough here to note that the State does make the magnificent gesture of admitting its indebtedness to men of culture who have done disinterested work. We have no Prytaneum in which to maintain them; no Maecenas to lavish favours on our Virgils and Horaces; and no practice of aristocratic patronage as in the eighteenth century. Happily the general educated public has, for many purposes, taken the place of the patron; and it is perhaps in the main a healthy safeguard against artistic exclusiveness, preciousness, and vanity that even poets and artists should contrive to maintain themselves by work.

But it would be monstrous if we acted upon the assumption that art and learning must pay, or failed to recognise the terrible wastage of talent that results from economic pressure. We cannot feel that it is creditable to a nation to let a Gissing die in extreme poverty or a W. H. Hudson eke out a mean existence in a dingy suburban home. It is well that in the annual award of Civil List pensions we should have recognition of the principle that those who have made their contribution to national culture have rendered public services, and shall be given pensions to enable them to continue their work or die in peace.

Having said so much, I turn to the last list of pensions recently granted. The names of the recipients have been published in the Press; but I do not care to give further publicity to them by mentioning them again; for while it is a high honour to be included in this list, it is shameful that they should be given such pensions. A.B.—“in recognition of his services to literature . . . £60”. C.D.—“in recognition of his services to literature . . . £60”. The biggest pension awarded to any one of these fourteen persons here “recognised” is £100; and looking over the lists of recent years I find that the amount has often been only £50 or even £40. Why not at once simplify the matter by qualifying these men of letters and artists to be on the dole? Or might not their children be given free milk through the agency of the Milk Marketing Board, to assure at least some minimum of nourishment? A paternal State admits its debt to men of art and learning, and discharges it by granting a pauper’s allowance

The proceedings at the Congrès International des Ecrivains pour la défense de la culture, held at Paris, were scarcely alluded to, much less reported, in the English Press; and even the French Press gave slender accounts of it. Not all of the addresses, perhaps, were worth recording, if we are considering them in the interests of culture rather than propaganda. But I am glad that Mr. Forster has given *The London Mercury* the opportunity of printing his own address, which appears in this number. On such an occasion as this it was proper that he should specially consider those dangers to culture which arise from action taken by governments. For a situation has arisen in certain countries in Europe under which the very bases of culture are undermined by State repression and therefore no other aspect of the question is so urgent. There would be nothing left to discuss if governments foisted their own brands of learning, religion and political opinion on the universities, the churches, and the Press. Learning, religion and political thought would be petrified.

But since we have not yet come to that pass in Britain, it is also worth considering the less pressing but more permanent dangers to culture—a word which I am driven into using, though it has become an awkward one since Matthew Arnold, Jowett and their followers nearly spoilt it for all time. I am not thinking of it in its obvious and harmless sense, as used, for example, in the monumental work of Dr. Preserved Smith, where it simply means the accumulated stock of philosophical and scientific ideas and artistic products as possessed by any civilisation at any moment, as taken from the past and assimilated and re-shaped in the present. Not that this is irrelevant, for if we were denied the freedom to talk and write and to re-digest what has been handed on, even the past would gradually vanish into oblivion—as in the Dark Ages—and the culture of the present would be non-existent.

But there is another sense of the term in which it signifies a quality of the individual spirit—though it always has reference to things outside us. Matthew Arnold thus used the term in the familiar words which have acquired a certain savour of cant—“a pursuit of our total perfection by means of getting to know . . . the best which has been thought and said in the world”—but it is worth remembering that it implied for him “the detaching ourselves from our stock notions and habits”—“a more free play of consciousness”. Admitting that there is the least possible opportunity for such “free play” under State censorship, we must also recognise that even in democracies we are not wholly immune from “stock notions and habits”. There are the stock notions and habits of the bourgeois middle-class, and there are also the stock notions and habits of those who are the very high priests of culture, who move in sacred groves aromatic with choice ideas and distilled learning. These may be the most dangerous of all, for there the defilement comes from the fountain-head of culture, which thus becomes its own worst enemy. The Spanish philosopher, Ortega Y Gasset, has dwelt upon this peril in his book *The Modern Theme*, where he shows how culture, in the hands of those

who pursue reason at the expense of spontaneity, becomes "relegated to increasingly remote distances from the vitality which creates it". It tends to "dry up and become ritualised". Such a culture is dessicating and deadly. "Culture only survives while it continues to receive a constant flow of vitality from those who practise it". We know its deadness in some rational, clever university circles ; in some circles outside universities; in some groups whose leaders would set the tone and positively prescribe in matters of taste for the intellectual young.

We are more or less between the devil and the deep sea—between what Nietzsche called the "truckling, plebeian curiosity" of the English middle-class mind and the sensitive intellectualism of—but perhaps it is better not to mention names. To blatant vulgarity there is no antidote in intellectualism devoid of vitality, or in taste without "guts" Nietzsche in his happier moods objected to that noise and fuss which fills the air and obscures issues that matter to persons conscious of inner lives of their own to be lived and of personal values incompatible with ostensible values proclaimed in public speeches and the Press. And in this happy mood he spoke of the French—the French of fifty years ago—and their reverence for the "small number"—the small number which made possible "a sort of chamber music of literature". Yes—but he did not mean the chamber music of a few *virtuosi* applauding their own performances. The still small voice—assuredly—"the goldenness and coldness which all things show that have perfected themselves"—but not a clique of pedants safely wrapped in overalls behind a splashing Niagara. "Is it not a theme worthy of a generation which stands at the most radical crisis of modern history", says Ortega, "if an attempt be made to oppose the tradition and see what happens if instead of saying 'life for the sake of culture' we say 'culture for the sake of life?'"

NOVEMBER 1935

The *London Mercury* has received an indignant letter from a lady living in Italy—an Englishwoman—saying that she will not renew her subscription to this magazine or buy any other journal that comes from England so long as this country pursues its present policy towards Italy. This seems to be a little hard on *The London Mercury*, which is not a political journal, and very hard on certain other journals which, being political, are as pro-Mussolini as Mussolini's Italian Press. How ungrateful to Lord Beaverbrook, for example, who is doing his best for a fellow dictator; and to Mr. J. L. Garvin, a surely unexpected ally; and to the editor of *Time and Tide*, who, against her own opinions and those of her paper, has broadmindedly given hospitality to Mr. Bernard Shaw in one of his moods of destructive, inertia-producing gaiety.

I am not proposing to enter into that controversy. It is outside our province. I shall say nothing, if I can help it, which would offend the susceptibilities of the English lady who is devoting her attention exclusively to Italian literature. It is, however, to our purpose here to consider what is the attitude of the literary man or artist, *qua* literary man or artist, to insistent public and practical matters—the international crisis, the General Election, defence, unemployment, Big Business, party politics. I may be allowed for the sake of argument to assume the existence of such a thing as the mere literary man or the mere artist—that is to say, to take one element which is present in some degree in the personality of every sensitive human being, and isolate it, and consider how, under its promptings, he will behave on various occasions. This is to assume the existence of an individual primarily interested in art, literature and intelligent recreation—or rather, shall I say, in that approach to actual experience which we take to be that of the imaginative artist.

It is not, then, suggested that the world is divided up into

two mutually exclusive classes, the one consisting of practical people, especially interested in such things as politics, and the other of contemplative people, who read poetry and have a taste in pictures. If we were really going to divide the world up like that, we should have to add other classes—including those who are primarily interested, for example, in dog-races or boxing matches. But the human race does not arrange itself like that. Mr. Priestley goes to boxing matches, but he is also a writer of good literary essays. Often the various elements overlap, intermingle and cannot easily be separated in given individuals. But sometimes they can. One cannot easily think of Keats, or Rossetti or Walter Pater as a party-politician, or imagine the late Joseph Chamberlain as a poet. Those are extreme cases, but apart from such cases it is surely a fact that there are groups of persons whose conscious approach to life tends to be through the imagination or by means of a sharpened critical apparatus, and other groups consisting of those who are primarily occupied with getting things done through politics, social reform or other practical activity. There are not many persons like, shall I say, Professor Gilbert Murray, who can turn readily from intimate intercourse with the Greek tragic poets to the dusty conflicts of international politics, or like Mr. H. W. Nevinson, who has always gone about promoting this social cause and that and simultaneously spreading the sweetness and light of the classic writers.

I must not pause to describe this archetypal literary man of whom I was speaking. He is, of course, a person well read, but the extent of his reading is not so important as the manner of his reading. He reads for the sake of the experience which he derives from reading; and may even labour in the process in order that the activity of understanding may be more fruitful and rich. But literature for him is not opposed to life, but an extension of it—life projected backwards and forwards in space and time, and, so far from being irrelevant to the here and now, is the background without which it is unintelligible or only half intelligible, or the illuminant which makes visible hitherto

unnoticed elements in the present. This man is not in the least indifferent to ordinary life or its commonplaces, he accepts them for the little or much that they may be worth. What his reactions will be to natural scenery, to ancient and modern architecture, to a banquet of city gentlemen at the Guildhall, or to a football match, I need not attempt to suggest except to say that in all circumstances of life he is alert, and anxious not only to get choice, pleasurable impressions from what is going on, but impressions which will stand the test of comparison with the rest of reality—in other words, he wants the truth, or something that is as free from falsehood as possible.

He clearly cannot fail to be intensely interested in such a matter as a General Election, which is of so much concern to the world. For I have assumed him to be not less interested in actual life than other people, but more. But he will endeavour to take the situation at its real rather than its surface value. Though he will not think that what people say is more true because they are speaking under excitement or the influence of mass-emotion, on the other hand he will remember that mass-emotion may also represent that intensity of feeling which the majority of people at more normal times miss. He will at least be anxious to take his part in helping sanity to prevail.

A little time ago I had occasion to comment on the neglect of the arts by the State, as shown in the inadequate expenditure on museums and art galleries, the refusal to subsidise a National Theatre or National Opera House, or to give adequate pensions to men of letters. But it is fair to add that there are two sides to this question. If the State is disdainful of letters, is it not also true that men of letters—those at least who are concerned with what is called creative literature—are apt to be rather disdainful of the State? Literature is not politics, and politics is not literature, but it is rather a serious matter when two worlds are as aloof from each other as they are in Great Britain. The politician and the man of letters are not merely living in the same world; they are dealing with the same world.

Their methods of approach to it must necessarily be different, the one being concerned to control and alter it by organised action and the other to present it in various aspects, as he sees it, and under a chosen perspective. But that these two worlds should be cut as much asunder as they are to-day, that there should be so few contacts, so little sympathetic understanding—so much less, certainly, than there was in the Edwardian epoch—is not conducive to the health either of politics or literature. The one is deprived of imagination and vitality. The other is driven back into a narrowed field of private experience.

In this respect the life of Winifred Holtby, who died on September 29th, was a rare exception. She stood midway between the contrasted worlds of politics and imaginative literature. Sometimes she seemed to be immersed in the one, sometimes in the other. She brought the gaiety, the swiftness, the reckless sympathy which belonged to the essentially imaginative side of her nature into politics and the breath of *la haute politique* into one or two of her novels. (I see that *Mandoa, Mandoa!* which the Abyssinian affair has turned into a “topical” novel, has just been re-issued by Messrs. Collins in their popular Green Leaf Library.) Often her literary friends wondered if she were not spending too much of her energy on the League of Nations Union, feminist propaganda, the African native problem and on political speeches, while her political friends regretted that her persuasive power as a speaker was not devoted exclusively to politics. The call of life, assuming innumerable forms, swept her along as if devouring energy left her no choice. But it was determined by her nature—generous, so that no demand from friends or from causes could be resisted; receptive of imaginative ideas which flashed upon her and held her under their spell till some new book was all too hurriedly begun and finished; irresponsible and gay, so that she would have welcomed more well-earned moments of pleasure if obtrusive duty had not constantly hindered. A life lived quickly, productively and splendidly.

1936

FEBRUARY

World events during the last month or two have compelled the British people to be more introspective, more self-conscious, than is their wont. When the Hoare-Laval agreement about Abyssinia was made known there was a sudden stir in the mind of the nation. In a flash it was revealed that the country had a mind characteristically its own. Ideas that had been germinating for years instantly gave birth to an opinion, crystal clear, about the proper conduct of its foreign policy. A sudden uprush of opinion that had nothing to do with political parties or allegiances swept past a powerfully entrenched Government and a Parliamentary majority, and dictated the reversal of a Cabinet decision.

I can remember no other time in my life, when, moving about and hearing the talk of all sorts of people—literary people, business men, bus conductors—I found them so profoundly moved by what was at bottom an idea, an idea indicating a certain conception of honour inseparable from the British type of civilisation as now arrived at. I must not attempt to analyse the complex of elements which entered into that idea. It was much more dependent on intellectual reasoning than was that simple moral instinct which urged the Victorians to support the cause of oppressed nationalities. The idea in this case was not merely that of helping outraged Abyssinia, but of strengthening a system of collective action, contributing to a planned world, by means which creative thinkers have been discussing for twenty years, the object being peace and the preservation of that kind of civilisation which we value.

M A Y 1 9 3 6

"Some new kind of thunder and lightning is long overdue in letters", say Mr. William Nuttall in the course of the correspondence which appears on later pages. Others have said this before, but Mr. Nuttall goes further and states with precision what the need is, from what source it may be satisfied, and in what manner. He indicates a revolution (without blood, and without destruction) which may exert its force at any moment and compel recognition. He may even have helped to precipitate it by dropping a match among combustible material lying around. Have not some of the younger working-class intelligentsia already "taken fire" from his article which we published last March? The interest it has aroused has appeared, not among academic critics, nor even among novelty-seeking poets, but in just those quarters where, if the diagnosis was right, we should expect it to have appeared.

If the argument has substance, it must start from the fact that literature, in its totality, and in so far as it is vital, tends to be a complete expression of what is most essential in the life of its age, and that this movement, *ex hypothesi*, would restore to literature its grip on those realities which thrust themselves most poignantly on the modern consciousness. What is foreseen is something more than the next stage in literary development along a straight line of progress; it is the enrichment of literature by the introduction into it of a new sort of awareness that has never yet permeated it, derived from the subterranean depths of the insufficiently explored mind of the inarticulate masses.

The thesis which we are asked to consider is that the bulk of English literature, and indeed of world literature, has been written by men or women who have either never known from within, instinctively, the working-class mind, or, if they have known it, have been estranged from it by education and the adoption of a middle-class attitude. (Some exceptions, we must surely suppose, are allowed for.)

Literature up to now has had other new fields to explore, it has not yet dived down into the recondite consciousness of the most passive and least expressive, though most numerous, elements in the community. Not that the novel as an art-form has ever accepted any boundaries in regard to its human subject-matter. The whole range of human nature lay before it from the time of Fielding to the time of Joyce, and there was no kind of character which might not be depicted. So long as the treatment of character was external, as it was in Fielding and Dickens, and consisted of mimicry of observable behaviour, palpable errors were reduced to a minimum in the work of a skilled novelist. But when characters began to be analysed, as they were by George Eliot or Meredith, the opportunities of palpable error became more numerous. And when the novelist went a stage farther, and invited us to look at the world through the eyes of one or more of the characters—a method which has been progressively practised since Flaubert, Henry James, Conrad, Joyce, Proust, Miss Dorothy Richardson and Mrs. Virginia Woolf gave their respective twists to the technique of the novel—the art of fiction, while being subtly refined, has been at the same time restricted to those spheres of consciousness which the novelists have been personally capable of penetrating. It is true, within this sphere its domain was doubled when to the male consciousness of the world Miss Richardson and Mrs. Woolf added the female consciousness. That was an enormous extension. But there still remained that vast tract of awareness, whose surface had often been shown, but whose depths had rarely been plumbed—that of the submerged nine-tenths of the human species.

To some critics it has even seemed that the novel has now reached its final stage, and can go no further except by refining upon its refinements. So much did Mr. Percy Lubbock seem to be impressed by this when he wrote his admirable book, *The Craft of Fiction*, that he suggested we have now reached a stage when “the only interest of the criticism of fiction” lay in the question of “the relation in

which the narrator stands to the story"—an interest which, if I am not mistaken, Mr. Crankshaw has just been pursuing in his critique of Conrad. This is all very well, but—well, really, there is something to be said for cross-word puzzles. The writing of good fiction is something more than a clever dodge. It is a handling of life—and the reality of the life which it handles and the penetration of this reality by the novelist are the first things. Technique is not the first thing.

If the novel is to be regarded as an art in the fullest sense of the term it must be capable of putting itself into a certain relationship with what is most significant in the life of our time. There can be no major current of interest which will lie outside its ken so long as that current of interest enters deeply into normal human life. Arnold Bennett and Mr. E. M. Forster, in some of their novels, made contributions each in his own way to the broad interpretation of modern life. (I mention these rather than the more obvious case of Mr. H. G. Wells, because their method has been, as his was not, strictly appropriate to the fine art of fiction.) But they would have required miraculous powers of divination to do what Mr. Nuttall says remains to be done—namely, to show in the finest possible way the world as it reveals itself to the proletarian mind.

How far this may already have been done by novelists in the past I have not here space to discuss—to what extent, for example, Hardy successfully got into the mind of Jude, or Gissing into the minds of the poor whom he knew well, or D. H. Lawrence in *Sons and Lovers*. But it is at least clear that imaginative literature has not taken us far along this road, although we have reached that remarkable stage in the history of the world when Labour is not merely literate and enfranchised, but is sending its sons into universities, has made and partly manned governments, controls a great part of local government, and watches with breathless interest the vast experiment of Soviet Russia. The proletarian mind aims at the mastery of society, and the conflict between the Labour and Fascist movements is the major social event of our time. The awakening of the

masses through education and through enfranchisement has created an intensely class-conscious proletariat whose mode of consciousness must become a matter of major interest and importance to every intelligent living person. Is not Mr. Nuttall right when he says it is time that the mode of consciousness which lies behind these prodigious movements should find adequate expression in literature and that writers who have the requisite experience should fit themselves for their task by studying bourgeois models, and applying the established technique to their new subject matter? And we may add literature may prove, from a social point of view, one of the best of safety-valves, making its indispensable contribution to that understanding of one part of the community by another which is a condition of peace?

It is only to-day, when naturally talented men and women of proletarian origin have access to higher education, that the ideals of Mr. Nuttall can be realised. From the quinquennial report which has just been issued by the University Grants Committee we learn that the number of full-time students in universities and university colleges, which was 20,000 at the beginning of the century, has now risen to 40,000; and that of the students in the provincial universities 50 per cent. began their education in public elementary schools—that is to say, spring from the class that is known as the working-class. In other words, thousands of promising young persons of proletarian origin pass every year into the universities and colleges, amongst whom one must suppose there will be some at least who will be able to claim, like Mr. Halward, both that they are capable of expressing themselves, and that they are “working-class entirely and absolutely and will never be anything else at heart”.

We are not, of course, discussing the desirability of class-consciousness. Presumably in an ideal world there would be no cleavage of classes, and no prejudice among members of the one against the “ideology” of the other. It is obviously a limitation, a defect, in Mr. Nuttall, which he is

the first to recognise, that he feels uneasiness in the company of bourgeois characters in fiction, just as it would be a defect in a middle-class reader if he were uneasy when in contact with proletarian characters. But since different modes of experience in this or that environment produce different attitudes of mind, we must suppose that there does exist a mode of vision which we may call proletarian; and that until this is explored in literature, literature will be deficient and lop-sided, and our understanding of the world through literature will be incomplete.

It will be observed that it is clearly recognised that it is only when a proletarian writer has added education and knowledge to natural aptitude, and has disciplined his mind by study of existing models of literature, that he will be qualified to produce "proletarian literature" on the grand scale. It is necessary to admit that the proletariat, simply as proletariat, cannot produce great literature, art, or philosophy. It has been inarticulate because it has been ignorant, and nothing can be built on the basis of ignorance. It is only when the instinctive apperceptions of the masses are strengthened by intellectual acquirements hitherto denied them that literature worthy of the name will be produced from their midst, and it will be the function of criticism to insist that no slap-dash facile writing will be awarded the crown that cannot be earned without endeavour and discipline. Those who are deeply concerned about literature will have to keep their critical wits about them so that the proletarian movement may not be at the expense of literature rather than to its enrichment—so that it may not threaten the standards that exist, but submit itself to the same or equally exacting standards. The aristocracy of intellect will need guarding no less jealously than before, though the time has come when it is required to open its doors more widely.

JUNE 1936

Nine days before his death Professor A. E. Housman wrote a letter which in view of the event seems a startling prophecy, as if he were assured of the immediacy of the approaching end. The letter was addressed to myself, and was in response to a request that he should send me something for publication in *The London Mercury*. In it he wrote: "I am obliged by your letter, but my career and it is to be hoped my life are so near their close that it is to be hoped they will concern neither of us much longer". It was dated April 21st. He died in a Cambridge nursing home on April 30th.

Had he, after all—and intentionally—sent me a few words to publish as a last message—grim, but consistent with what he had constantly said before, and revealing him, not merely meeting with fortitude, but welcoming the considered conclusion? That single, packed sentence, written in his own hand from Trinity College, so terrifically unexpected, charged with the sense of the fatuity of achievement, had on me the effect of a sudden, violent, but skilfully delivered blow. Note the cumulative effect of these few words—his career is near its close—it is "to be hoped" his life is also—it is "to be hoped" they will not concern him much longer—and it is ironically assumed that we commentators, too, will not be much longer concerned about him when he is gone.

The letter, as I have said, is fully in keeping with his utterances in poetry and the more intimate disclosures of his personality in some of his prose. It might be difficult to understand if we judged his career from without merely by the record of his zestful work and his distinguished achievement in scholarship. There are some who rank him highest in respect of his adventurous first-class work as an editor of obscure Latin texts before and during the periods when he was Professor of Latin, first, at University College, London, and afterwards at Cambridge. But it is, of course, impossible

to separate the poet who wrote so simply and so intimately from the scholar who pursued the academic life often with aloofness and some appearance of disdain for his fellow-men. The personality which is revealed in *A Shropshire Lad* is operative also in the lively prefaces to his classical works, and the pessimism which enters into and gives macabre character to the sweetest of his verses must be reconciled with his evident delight in precise, exacting work, and in his observance of standards which for him were never relaxed. Perfection of work down to the last detail of an accent or a comma he insisted upon. When he issued his *Last Poems* in 1922 he thought it well that he should be here to see it through the press "and control its spelling and punctuation". These poems, he has told us, sprang from inspiration, or from "sudden and unaccountable emotion"; all the more reason, then, we must suppose, that his merely intellectual self should pay them the respect of correct spelling and careful punctuation.

Just as *Lyrical Ballards* was the outcome of a short period of intense excitement when Coleridge, William Wordsworth and Dorothy Wordsworth were together in the Quantocks, their minds interacting by some forceful chemical affinity, so *A Shropshire Lad* was the outcome in the early months of 1895 of a "continuous excitement", the secret of which, we are told, will be disclosed some years hence. He was then thirty-six years of age, still just young enough to be young and old enough to be wise. He was already a Professor of Latin, with enough scholarly achievement behind him for discretion—yes, and for the cultivation of reserve. He burst into poetry—poetry of the utmost lyrical simplicity, ballad poetry much of it might be called, dealing with primitive subjects, in which passion was half-concealed by sweetness, but nakedly revealed in the bitter tang of a few disillusioning, death-dealing lines. It rarely if ever attained sublimity, because it lacked the profundity of thought which is necessary to the most exalted poetry. Housman's mind was intellectually but not philosophically endowed. His ear was exquisitely sensitive to the musical

quality of words He was in love, clearly, with the music of his verse ("Poetry is not the thing said but a way of saying it") which, no doubt, as it came to him under the stress of emotion, moved him even more masterfully than other verses of which he says, "I can hardly keep my voice steady in reading it" But it is controlled—controlled by the laws of the traditional lyrical poetry which was habitually in his mind. But it was not the music only that he was in love with—he was in love also with his own ironic sense, and his idea of the fugitiveness of what was loveable in love and in life, the transitoriness of beauty and of the affections, the omnipresence of death, his mind perpetually teased itself with the thought that the body at its most vivid moments was already half-way towards being a skeleton. He will begin, quite simply and charmingly

When I was one-and-twenty
I heard a wise man say,
"Give crowns and pounds and guineas
But not your heart away,
Give pearls away and rubies
But keep your fancy free"
But I was one-and-twenty,
No use to talk to me

and end with the disillusionment of "And I am two-and-twenty"—the author, at the time, being thirty-six.

His eyes are turned to the beauty of the daffodil—"that dies"—and his ears to the chimes of "the bells that sound so clear" on Bredon—and will soon be tolling "the one bell only" for mourners. Yet while all the time he is concerned about death it seems to be because for him life is the supremely desirable thing mocked always by its perpetual surrender to death; and he envies

The lads that will die in their glory and never be old
just because they will not continue to live a life frustrated by decay. Yet the pleasing verses which he turns with such evident delight derive their major quality from just this sense, that all that is pleasurable is grievous and that no joy is a joy till it is already becoming dust and ashes. We

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may be sure that he derived some ironic satisfaction from writing:

Be still, be still, my soul, it is but for a season
Let us endure an hour and see injustice done

and that much later in life, in verses in *Last Poems*, he remembered with relish how he had breathed in anticipation the "air of other summers," writing.

They came and were and are not
And come no more anew,
And all the years and seasons
That ever can ensue
Must now be worse and few

After that one pauses to take breath. But perhaps one should not be inordinately distressed. Did not Housman after such efforts, such skilful distillation of lugubrious sweetness, turn like a giant refreshed to his labours at the text of Manilius, to Propertius and Lucan, to his Liddell and Scott, to the dining clubs, at which connoisseurship in words was discreetly mingled with connoisseurship in wines? There were pleasures, too, to be derived from holding a serious academic audience spellbound by a beautiful dissertation on "The Name and Nature of Poetry", and by making that audience at the end sit up with gasps of astonishment by assuring it that the source of poetic suggestion was "the pit of the stomach". The foreseen tragic exquisiteness of the joke with which Housman concluded his last great utterance was that his audience did not see it.

O C T O B E R 1936

It seems to me necessary that *The London Mercury* and those whose interests it seeks to assert should be, in a certain sense, self-conscious about themselves and the part they have to play in this turbid world. Such persons will not wish to keep the arts too detached from the rest of life. The old literature only lives again when it is related to all that makes the new literature, which is itself a part of the world we live

in. Therefore the artist's life cannot divorce itself from what is called the practical life, and have no concern with the cataclysmic events which make so persistent a demand on our attention, which are turning modern society upside down—threatening, for example, wars and the loss of that very freedom which is the first condition of creative effort. We find that some of our least turbulent novelists and poets are at this moment preparing to take a part in international politics as defenders of freedom, and that others are charging themselves with a mission on behalf of some political or even economic cause. We could not wish it to be otherwise; we could not wish that the violent transformation of the world which is taking place before our eyes should be guided only by those who have little imaginative understanding.

Yet the danger is obvious—that in embarking on a crusade the campaigning spirit may prove stronger than the cause, and that we may forget what Pater called that "loyalty to cool and candid reason" so indispensable to those who cannot acquiesce in half-truths and humbug. The problem for the man of letters and the artist and all who are on their side to-day is to keep their end up in a society peculiarly intent on the bare struggle for existence, and to enable the finer apprehension of values to survive at all—not merely to keep intellectual interests alive (there is any amount of intellectual activity), but to keep them salted and intellectually whole.

This is perhaps the more difficult because there is so little unity in the intellectual or literary life of the time. It is not the differences between those who, *au fond*, have the same interests that matter most. "Potter quarrels with potter, carpenter with carpenter", and writer with writer; the ball of rational discussion is kept rolling, and little harm is done if the disputants remember that they belong to one family, and have more to defend together against the common enemy of Philistinism than against each other. What matters much more is the difference between those who write or speak with just claims to authority and those

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who have none. This is not merely the difference between the genuine and the spurious artist; more dangerous than the latter is the expert on one subject who gains a hearing when he lays down the law on another subject—the judge who discusses modern morals in court, the scientist who turns theologian: the doctor who talks psychology: the literary grammarian who claims to be a critic: the engineer who aspires to lead taste in architecture. At a time when so many opinionated people, with the popular Press to back them, receive the respect of the public on wrong grounds, it is more than ever important that "cool and candid reason" should fortify itself, and make a stand against the false culture.

N O V E M B E R 1 9 3 6

There has been much making of speeches by literary people during the month of October, and it chanced that in the course of five days I had the experience, unusual for me, of hearing a good many of them. On a Saturday Mr. W. B. Yeats broadcast on the subject of "Modern Poetry". On the following Tuesday a dinner was given to Mr. Wells by the P.E.N. Club to celebrate his seventieth birthday, with Mr. Priestley in the chair and Mr. Shaw among the speakers. Two days later, at the Literary Society of Cheltenham, I heard Mr. Humbert Wolfe, Mr. Cecil Day Lewis, and Miss Rosamond Lehmann (who spoke a few words only). If I had seen books from all these writers appearing simultaneously from the publishers I probably should not have been particularly impressed by the strange collocation of names. But in hearing their voices, one after another, it struck me as odd that among the literary luminaries of our world should be simultaneously included Shaw, Wells, W. B. Yeats, Priestley, Humbert Wolfe, Cecil Day Lewis, and Miss Lehmann. (Of course, one might add indefinitely to the list and make it seem stranger still.)

There we have a number of writers, all effectively address-

sing modern readers, yet removed from one another by gulfs of temperament and by the generations to which they respectively belong. Of all of these only Mr Yeats stands outside of and above any particular time, he reminds us that he and his earlier friends deliberately "tried to write like the poets of the Greek Anthology, or like Catullus, or like the Jacobean lyrists, men who wrote while poetry was still pure"—looking neither forward nor outward, but back, because only by not being too near their subject-matter could they see the larger issues in proportion, and express them in imaginative terms which would be permanently valid.

Yet I must qualify the suggestion that all the others are peculiarly exponents of their time. Mr. Priestley, of course, chooses contemporary subject-matter, but he is not distinctively a product of the nineteen-thirties. And the writing of Miss Lehmann—though her theme, too, and her analytical method are modern enough—comes from a clear spring of pure perceptiveness which takes her straight to realities, that are not less universal because restricted to the domain of personal almost private, feeling. None the less, all of these writers are acutely, and I should gather constantly, aware of the fact that they themselves or their contemporaries belong to groups separated to some extent by the time in which they happened to be born. Mr. Humbert Wolfe lamented the fact that he was "middle-aged", neither old nor young, at a sort of awkward age misplaced between the two. Both Mr. Yeats and Mr. Wells revealed their uneasiness and perplexity at the drift of modern literature, the one speaking of the "overwhelming social bitterness" of the abler young poets, the other of the "moral and intellectual confusions of the aimless adolescent", due to the "stress of change" through which neither the young nor the old could clearly find their way.

The doctrine of the swiftness of change is a commonplace to-day; but Mr. Wells, dwelling upon it thirty or forty years ago, was the first writer who enlarged upon the theme and showed how the quick tempo was affecting environment,

thought, habits of life, and morality, and thrusting upon us the necessity of living more and more in the future, with a view to planning and directing the process rationally. The realisation of all this has been gradually growing for a century and a half. Science, with the inventions that followed it, began by altering all the externals of life. It soon disturbed religion, and modified the whole economic basis of society; moral conventions had to be revised; nations ceased to be self-dependent; the politician was confronted with situations which changed too quickly for his preoccupied mind.

Mr. Wells, was, of course, not the first to realise the serious social effects of our all too quick evolution. Poets were welcoming or protesting against it at the beginning of the nineteenth century, Matthew Arnold examined it in relation to culture; Ibsen and Samuel Butler in relation to morals and habits, in the light of it, Marx taught Socialism and Nietzsche a sort of glorified Fascism. But Mr. Wells was the first, I think, to face the problem insistently and as a whole, explaining explicitly and imaginatively the significance of the process of quick change in relation to war and peace, thought, morals, conventions, and social and individual happiness. After this time—say from thirty years ago onwards—there was no longer any excuse for anyone interested in the social order to live exclusively in the past or even in the present; it was essential to live to some extent in the future if any direction was to be given to the fast-running current. It was no longer possible to think of society, or social standards and ways of life, as static; it had become dynamic; we have to think in terms of an endless stream which may assume the form of ordered organic movement, directed by the will, or the formlessness of drift and perhaps successive aimless revolutions.

But all this, it may be said, is not necessarily the business of either the novelist or the poet. Cannot the latter live, as Mr. Yeats in the main has done, above the conflict, in the sphere of his own eternal verities? Certainly he may, and the novelist, too, may dwell in the quieter region of

his or her own impressions and reactions, without stating a theory of life or concerning himself with social ends, even if they are implicit in his social material. None the less literature as a whole is at all times determined by the social structure to which it belongs, and by the faith which is its basis. A static society has its faith expressed in terms of a fixed conception of duty. But our society has ceased to be static; we have to think in terms of the perpetual flux. Hence the disorder, at this early stage of adjustment to a dynamic society—hence what Mr. Wells described the other day as “the shattered morale of our race”—its “disordered will”. But the substitute for faith which he offers, valuable as it might be, would impose a rather severe burden on an imaginatively starved and rationally immature human race. He described it as “a real, modern encyclopædism which could assemble knowledge, correlate ideas, make them more widely accessible, and so hold the mind of this distraught world together”.

This is all very well, but it takes some time to master even the best arranged encyclopædia; and it is of the essence of his encyclopædism that it must all be mastered before it is really effective. More knowledge is his remedy for the ills of the world; and undoubtedly more knowledge is a condition of the remedy. But for only one man in ten thousand can the pursuit of knowledge be a faith, or its acquisition an inspiration. And whilst we are going through the long and arduous process of learning, what then? Students do not wait till they have completed their courses before they mix themselves up in revolutionary movements. I am all for Mr. Well's encyclopædism, but I cannot see it as an adequate substitute for a creed.

I should have thought the whole tenor of his life-work pointed to a slightly different solution—after a static society, readjustment to the conditions of an ever-changing society, finding its faith in the will to direct change. Though such direction must be in the light of knowledge, the intermediate ends to be aimed at anywhere short of Paradise will always be determined by temperament, and will involve the

conflicting religious convictions of Left and Right—though the conflict need not always assume the crude, old-fashioned form of war.

But because such matters as these profoundly affect imaginative writers and determine what they write, it does not follow that it is their business always to be writing about them. A poet may be a Communist or a Fascist, and his mind may be filled with Communist or Fascist ideas; but when he is writing as a poet he will not be trying to persuade us, but will simply be recording his vision, revealing it for what it is worth. To-day propagandist poetry is spoken of much as the “novel with a purpose” was spoken of a quarter of a century ago. In 1912 Mr. Wells insisted on his right to enlarge the scope of the novel, and make it something more than character-creation. “We are going to write about business and finance and politics and precedence and pretentiousness and decorum and indecorum, until a thousand pretences and ten thousand impostures shrivel in the cold, clear draught of our elucidations”. But he resented having his novels called “propaganda novels”, which seemed to imply that they were “confined to the definite service of some organised party, church or doctrine”. “My views . . . were at any rate my own views, and put forward without any strategic aim”.

That clears him in so far as he is a writer aiming at putting forth his views—for that no justification is needed except success. It would not clear him if he were aiming at being a practitioner of the art of the novel. But there he was safe, since he frankly refused to “accept the Novel as an art form”; though in fact, where he was most successful as novelist, he used more art than he admits. Similarly the propagandist poet, as propagandist, will be justified if he can really get his views over to the public; but what he writes will not be poetry if his vision is clouded by “strategic aims” or his inspiration displaced by the zeal of the teacher.

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Anyone who still has anything to say about the Coronation should say it now; for soon the subject, as a subject, will have been worn threadbare. The trickle of news and comment in the papers, already beginning to prepare the minds of the public for the great event, will soon have grown into a torrent. The time is near when anything that may be said on the subject will have no effect beyond that of creating a state of mind among the public and drawing larger crowds, on the appointed day, towards the magnetic centre of London, everything else will have long before been settled by the constitutional authorities, the Office of Works, the municipalities, the police, the advising architects, the contractors, the ticket agents, the transport concerns, and the insurance offices. All astute persons who hoped to influence the arrangements have already had their say, warmly discussing, for example, means of democratising the occasion so that the moderately rich may share with the very rich the privilege of buying seats. For myself, I offer no solution of the problem of dividing the million available seats (or whatever the figure is) among the twenty million people who want them. Whatever you do nineteen millions of them will be left out.

The question of street decoration is more discussible. One would like to think that a great deal of this could be left to the spontaneous enthusiasm and taste of each householder (as, indeed, some of it must be). But London is not a village. We have to organise our pleasures and our displays on the scale of modern life, and we are bound to work through officials and committees; and at least it is all to the good that a committee of accomplished architects should have been called together to give their advice. Artists and designers have already been at work considering with infinite ingenuity the means of turning our cold streets into scenes of warm rejoicing. The obvious difficulty which every designer has to face is that street decorations, in

the nature of the case, are temporary. You cannot give them a solid architectural character, for the flimsy cheap material which must be used would betray itself as sham. Whatever is done, therefore, ought to be designed with a view to the appropriate use of what in its nature is temporary and evanescent.

What decorative objects are there which obviously satisfy this requirement? No doubt there are many. A project which at once leaps to the mind is the profuse use of real flowers—flowers growing, flowers suitably displayed in boxes, cut flowers of the less perishable variety, and branches and leaves. What could be more pleasing to the eye or encouraging to a new rural industry than a floral Coronation—the lavish display of flowers and green plants in the streets and the generous planting of flowers in the parks and in gardens.

I need hardly say I do not propose the laying out of flower-beds *at the expense of trees*. I hear with horror of the proposal that the Westminster City Council should cut down the trees in Leicester Square to make room for flowers. May all the powers that be defend us!

It has also been suggested, I believe, that householders and shopkeepers should have the fronts of their houses or premises repaired, washed or painted. The Coronation affords an excellent opportunity for landlords to show respect to Royalty and do a good turn to their tenants by decorating the exterior of the buildings they own, and since the whole of London is to be regarded as the setting for the Coronation ceremonies, there is no reason why the whole of London within the five-mile radius should not benefit. If we are considering decoration, a spotlessly clean London would afford a very pleasing basis of operations.

In a country where the authority of the Throne rests so little on force and so much on popular consent it might seem least appropriate that the armed forces should always play a part in ceremonial functions. But it is not easy to find any suitable substitute. I suppose it is not absolutely necessary that a Coronation procession should be more

military in its composition than a Lord Mayor's Show. As it happened, the last Lord Mayor's Show did assume the character of a military parade, but the display of armed men was for the most part historical. Even so some persons in authority were concerned lest it should be supposed to savour of modern militarism, as was shown by the action taken on the Underground stations. Mr. Edward Wadsworth's posters, in which he had interpreted his instructions in a design advertising the show with a disturbing display of the latest weapons of precision, were summarily removed.

It would not be easy to dispense with soldiers and sailors in any impressive Royal pageant. They have been trained to move with stately precision; they have bright uniforms. A company of lawyers in their wigs would not look their best in contrast with Life Guards, a platoon of school-masters in cap and gown might seem provocative to the young, and a squad of doctors in operating overalls would be as formidable as a machine-gun section. Postmen, railway porters, and commissioners have their uniforms, and would add a pleasing decorative touch to the proceedings. But perhaps such suggestions are hardly more practical than the proposals that all those who cannot find seats should be invited to take part in the procession. The pacifists may console themselves with the reflection that the uniforms of ceremonial parades have nothing whatever to do with modern war. The soldier does not fight in a red tunic or a busby.

Mr. Granville-Barker, at the moment that I write, is stopping in London, his visit of course being not unconnected with the forth-coming production of his play *Waste* at the Westminster Theatre. Everyone interested in the modern theatre wishes that he were oftener in England and taking the active part that he is better qualified than anyone else to take in the production of plays. But one cannot altogether grudge him his withdrawal to a life of learned leisure and his absorption in the study of Shakespeare, for he has

much to contribute to it that is beyond the reach of any mere scholar. I do not suggest that there has been no searching criticism of Shakespeare written in recent years by men who were scholars and something more—there has been. But I know of no other critic who has just the qualifications of Mr. Granville-Barker. He has so far soaked himself in the study of Shakespeare and his period that he can no longer escape the charge of having much of the knowledge that constitutes scholarship; he has real literary sense; he has originative imagination; and in addition he has had unique experience in acting, play-writing, producing, and all that belongs to successful creative work on the stage. In devoting himself to the study of Shakespeare he has been able to put all his experience and his intuitive understanding at the service of those whose task it may be to interpret Shakespeare on the stage or who may simply wish to appreciate performances. After Mr. Granville-Barker there will never again be the same excuse for misinterpretation.

It is strange that his play *Waste* has never been publicly performed before (though it has been produced by the Stage Society). It was written as long ago as 1906, when the author was well under thirty, and had already written and produced *The Voysey Inheritance*.

In those days Mr. Granville-Barker was still to some extent under the spell of Bernard Shaw, and *Waste* inevitably challenges comparison with some of Shaw's plays. But the resemblance is in the main superficial. It is a criticism of, and in part a satire upon, public life in its presentation of Cabinet Ministers and their entourage, one disinterested man (who belongs to the superman tradition) being involved in the activities of conventional or tricky politicians, and brought to grief through a private fault of his own. The plot is not altogether convincing. It is unfolded here and there with touches of the dazzling Shavian manner. But the striking moments emerge from the conduct of real characters. These, unlike Mr. Shaw's puppets, are individuals. The women talk like women, and the Prime

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Minister, unlike the figures of *Back to Methuselah* and *The Apple Cart*, have the humanity and individuality of which even Prime Ministers are capable. The theme as treated does not seem to me to be so rooted in 1906 as to be in the least unintelligible in 1936.

1937

JANUARY

I had been meaning to write something about freedom and the law of libel, and found myself diverted at the outset by a sudden outburst of controversial talk in which every man and woman in the country took a part. Day after day it went on, and it seemed that nobody could discuss or think of anything else. The King's problem had become everybody's problem. Now it was the monarch, now it was the man, whose "freedom" or lack of freedom was the subject of passionate argument. One became aware, in a strange, unprecedented way, of the constituted authority of the real powers that be—Church, politicians, Press—speaking with a single stern admonishing voice as with the sense that the very Ark of the Covenant were in their keeping; and whilst a kind of delicacy kept forty million people from pushing their forty million views beyond the stage of mere talk, *authority*, in public, had the first word and the last.

And so, having started out to postulate the desirableness of freedom, I am checked by the obvious reflection that no two people mean the same thing by it. All the major troubles of the world turn upon the interpretation of the word, and the desirableness or otherwise of what it used to connote. Germany freed from the shackles of Versailles, and her free-thinkers under detention. Freedom in relation to Russia, Italy, Abyssinia, Spain. Freedom of speech in France, where M. Salengro was hounded to death by ruthless detraction, and in the United States, where gossip could tear to shreds the character of this person and that. And here, where our freedom has been asserted by proxy under the forms and hushed ritual of our democracy, we

find supreme rule symbolised in the person of one to whom freedom is denied.

There is no Absolute Freedom, and in any sense of the term excess may be harmful. This is illustrated forcibly in the case of the law of libel. At this moment two democratic countries, France and Britain, are preparing new legislation, apparently in opposite directions, the one to restrict freedom of writing, the other to increase it. Both changes can be justified. In France the freedom with which some sections of the Press indulge in any sort of scandalous talk and scurrility at the expense of public men has become an intolerable abuse. Here, on the other hand, when the author of a book or an article has unwittingly and without malice written something that may be damaging to someone, or alleged to be damaging, he or his editor or publisher or printer may be sued for libel and mulcted in damages often capriciously and extravagantly assessed. So uncertain is the operation of the law that editors and publishers naturally shrink from taking risks; and many things that ought to be said are never said.

Some considerable changes undoubtedly ought to be made in the direction of relaxing the law of libel. Yet it would be a mistake to go too far. At a meeting recently held to discuss the question Professor J. B. S. Haldane said that "truth is a fairly tough thing", and that we could do with "a good deal more ridicule and a spot more hatred and contempt". Truth, I agree, is likely to come out when discussion is free; but to what extent, even in Britain, can discussions in the Press be regarded as wholly free when three or four men control a majority of the newspapers which circulate in this country? If you control journals selling in millions, it is terribly easy to get away with a falsehood, at any rate for long enough to be dangerous. If at a meeting of the National Council of Civil Liberties one member were indiscreet enough to slander another, no doubt other members of the Council would speedily redress the balance and no harm would be done. But if a small army of gossip-writers, employed by one big controller

of newspapers, were turned on to say what they liked about a politician in a general election, that would not help to clarify the electoral issue. That can and sometimes does happen in France, and it does not promote the cause of truth. Therefore in that country it is becoming even more necessary to tighten up the law of libel than it is for us to relax it.

It is a far cry from the relatively mild restrictions of the libel law in England to the latest veto on free discussion issued by Dr. Goebbels in Germany. At a festival sitting of the Chamber of Culture he announced that henceforward no criticism of works of art, literature, music, drama, or of the artists engaged for stage, cinema, or concert performances will be permitted. "The place of criticism is to be taken by objective analysis and description. A commentator must not say that a work of art is good or bad".

In the last sentence there is a certain saving grace. When Dr. Goebbels is self-complacent in his crude *obiter dicta* about art and criticism, it is well to remind ourselves of the beam in our own eye. Do not let us imagine there are no prohibitions in England, or that all critics, even in some of the highly respected journals of this country, are encouraged to say the whole of what they think. Every intelligent reader of reviews in daily, evening, and Sunday papers knows that the reviewers are not prone to err on the side of censoriousness. The danger here is not that "real genius (to use the words of Dr. Goebbels) should be tormented and tortured by ephemeral criticisms", but that ephemeral criticism should discover a genius at every turn, and that every clever exploiter of popular taste should be warmly commended to the attention of an all too willing public. The result of the indiscriminate paeans of praise which are encouraged and even required in some contemporary journals is not merely that the populace is confirmed in its choice of the meretricious, but that real talent gets less than its due; even if praised, the praise has lost its value. The chorus of commendation which acclaims the mediocre is a persistent handicap to real talent. Genius is tormented

not by direct abuse but by the babble of eulogy bestowed on false literature, and the consequent degradation of the language of eulogy Dr. Goebbels' rule that commentators shall not say that works of art are good or bad is no worse, is even better, than a rule that they may only say that they are good.

However, we have only ourselves to blame if we choose to read the review pages of journals which call all works master-pieces. Here at least it is not the Government that imposes a ban on adverse criticism, and there are open to us other journals where free criticism is permitted. But Dr. Goebbels speaks for the State. Henceforward no more criticism—no praise or blame—no investigation of what may be true or not true, genuine or spurious.

His words have a certain ingenuousness about them. He speaks as one who believes that in suppressing free criticism he is relieving the creative artist of a noxious enemy. He makes the old popular mistake of supposing that the creative writer and the critic are in the nature of things opposed, the latter being a "scribbling grumbler" preferring to judge what he is unable to create. He forgets that some of the greatest critics of poetry have themselves been poets. "Not every critic of art is a genius", said Lessing; "but every genius is born a critic of art". And it was another countryman of his, Schlegel, who said that literature "is the comprehensive essence of the intellectual life of a nation".

The artist does not live in a world apart, spinning masterpieces out of his entrails. His subject-matter is the world of his experience, which includes his impressions of all that is happening around him and the accumulation of ideas which he has absorbed in his education, his reading, and all his contacts with history, art, and life. His own creative effort begins in his own critical attitude to the procession of ideas which constitutes his world; he is a sharer in the intellectual life of a nation which becomes vigorous in proportion as the stir of ideas, the active give and take, the bandying to and fro of the ball of thought from mind to mind go on freely and incessantly. The

critic is not his enemy. If he is functioning as he should do, he too is engaged in the "intellectual life of a nation", endeavouring to see as the artist has seen, to disentangle from his work what is significant and relevant to the larger issues, to give currency, as Arnold said, to the best ideas and create an atmosphere favourable to the birth of art.

Without criticism of life there is no art, and without criticism of art there is no appreciation, and this two-fold critical attitude contains the stimulus on which all creative effort depends. To destroy free criticism is to sterilise the soil out of which literature grows. The spectacle of Dr. Goebbels standing up to inform the people of Germany —the country which produced the critical writings of Winckelmann, Lessing, Goethe, the Schlegels, Schiller—that the integrity of her artistic honour is to be preserved by banning the critics is enough to make the all too few poets and artists of Germany turn in their graves. His prohibition will surely provoke from his countrymen the silent comment that he bans the praise and blame of critics because most of the praise, so far as it is genuine, would be given to Germans who are compelled, or choose, to live in exile. It is disturbing to see the spokesman of a great intellectual nation complacently announcing its cultural suicide.

FEBRUARY 1937

"We did not see you in Addis Ababa". This polite conversational remark was addressed to me the other day by a lady who had lived in the Ethiopian capital during the period of the recent war. It was as if everyone, assumed to be of a certain calibre, might have been expected to drop in for tea there any day between battles; and I had to confess with shame that I had been all the time in England. And so now: "We have not seen you, yet, in Madrid"—or, for that matter, in Burgos or Salamanca, for Spain has become the Holy Land whither all crusaders go; and not to

be there, it may be, is to miss the modern experience, the modern thrill, the very *fons et origo* of the new religion of society.

One asks about this and that person—littérateurs, poets, scientists too, and sociologists—wondering whether the answer will be “In Spain”. Not all young, by any means. H. N. Brailsford, for example, over sixty, had to be almost forcibly restrained from going out to join in the fighting. Professor J. B. S. Haldane went out to supervise the use of gas masks. Ralph Fox, aged 36, author of *Children of the Steppes*, *Storming Heaven*, and *Lemn*, died on January 3rd fighting for the Spanish Government on the Cordova Front. Young George Steer, lately the indefatigable champion and confidant of Hailé Selassié, has, needless to say, been questing from one part of Spain to another, alternately in search of news and a cause. Writers like Ralph Bates and Cyril Conolly are or have been there. Of the younger poets, one of them, a frequent contributor to this journal, Stephen Spender, has been seeking what he may discover behind the rebel lines; and another, W. H. Auden, was lately reported to be driving an ambulance.

In the upshot the whole intellectual world, if it is not in Spain, is talking about or writing about or thinking about that gruesome, threatening, yet in its way inspiring theme. It fills the air. It presses into our thoughts to the constant exclusion of other ideas. It is not, of course, just because men are fighting desperately in a peculiarly grim civil war with modern weapons and primeval savagery. It is not that it contains just the excitement of a seductive horror or the more generous appeal to pity. Both of these are present, they are elements conducive to the dramatisation of this tragedy. But it is the cause, the cause, that has turned this war into a crusade and made poor Spain the fighting-ground of Europe—the real struggle being between two political ideas that have come to dominate not merely political thought, but all the thought, tending to elbow out a third political idea which, just because it is less violent and less exciting, has no lustre, no use for those who aim at the intensification of their drama.

But leaving that aside for the moment, let us call the conflict not that between Fascism and Communism, but more simply between Fascism and anti-Fascism. For we in Britain all detest that noisy, capricious, arrogant, stifling influence which has established a new way of life in the Fascist countries and is promoting this way of life in any country where trouble can be stirred up. It concerns us not only as politicians, but from every other point of view, since Fascism (and still more Nazi-ism) is totalitarian in the fullest sense of the term; it imposes its régime not only in the sphere commonly called political, but asserts a single all-inclusive rule of patriotism, which governs religion and morality, limits choice of friendship, regulates teaching in universities, abolishes all criticism of art, and exiles men who dare to think their thoughts aloud.

With this cloud hanging over Europe, charged with the constant threat of war and the annihilation of culture, it is not surprising that so many artists, men of letters, and intellectuals generally should feel that nothing much matters compared with the taking up of this challenge, and that the one and only significant struggle of our time is that between the Fascist and the anti-Fascist spirit. Hence the magnetism of Spain for those who would face the challenge there on an actual fighting-ground; the torrent of controversial literature; and the diversion of poetic activity into propagandist writing. Hence the withdrawal of interest from so much else that at other times would have commanded attention, and concentration upon a single theme spectacularly centred just now in Spain, though the spotlight at any moment may be turned elsewhere.

The danger of all this is that we may have our way of life dictated to us by precisely those whom we set out to combat—I mean, by the authors of the totalitarian State. For the Fascists there can be only two things, Fascism and anti-Fascism. If we, in taking up their challenge, are hypnotised by them into thinking that nothing matters but this dualism, that the only significant thing of our time is this struggle—Fascism pitted against its apparent opposite

—then they have won the first bout; they have made us intellectually totalitarian, robbing us to that extent of our many-sidedness, our variety of opinions, the very elasticity and freedom of mind which we set out to defend

Mr. Anthony Eden may have been a little too complacent in the speech he made on January 13th. But one sentence was illuminating. Speaking of the doctrine which divides Europe between “the supporters of rival ideologies”, he went on: “Human nature is far too rich and too diversified to be hemmed in within such limitations”.

A Fascist country, from the nature of the case, must be hemmed in within these limits. Everything within it must have the Fascist character. But the position is different for us. If we accept the division of Europe as indicated by Mr. Eden, then we accept limitations of the same kind as those which are imposed under the dictatorships; we limit human nature to just that; we rule out the diversities, we rule out *our* culture, and make a voluntary sacrifice of all that is most distinctive of the cause of Freedom.

This is not merely a theoretical point. The more we examine it the more we find it to be an extremely practical one. To take the most obvious instance of all the Fascists have compelled us as a nation to rearm. We are a peace-loving people, and on principle dislike spending our hard-earned shillings on useless popguns; but we are so spending them now because Germany and Italy compel us to do so. I agree this has become necessary and inevitable. Though on principle we non-Fascists believe in winning by persuasion and not by brute force, we are to this extent compelled to follow suit when the Fascists lead and keep time with them in gun-making. But how far are we to be led by them? They say—in accordance with their proper role—nothing matters but this conflict between Left and Right. And we echo—contrary to our proper role—“nothing matters but this conflict”. How can we meet the totalitarian challenge effectively if in doing so we adopt the totalitarian habit of mind?

The dictators, Spain, the next war,—we think in these

terms. In politics the politicians—in spite of their pretence of differences—are all in substantial agreement about matters of public policy because the European problem is allowed to overshadow everything else. It is the same with the newspapers so far as they are concerned with serious matters, the field being left clear for the gutter Press to exploit minor sensations, such as their invented scandals about Royalties. The French Government, which might be supposed to be much more preoccupied than ours, has just provided the international P.E.N. Club with headquarters in Paris and a library. But would our Government so much as think of such a thing at this juncture? So far as the general public is concerned serious attention is diverted from the normal activities of literature, art, the theatre. The jerry-builder goes on spoiling the countryside, but the public has no time to give strenuous support to the societies which persist in their efforts to preserve amenities. The poets are thinking it their duty to drop poetry and write tracts—Mr. Spender, for example, resisting the benign advice of Mr. G. M. Young to “resume his singing robes”.

At the precise moment when we ought to be keeping our end up by demonstrating to the world that *our* way of life is superior to the Germanic or Italian way, since it gives free play to the liberty of the human mind, asserting itself in many-sided creativeness, in breadth and variety of interest, in, I will not say full-blooded *joie de vivre*—that may not be possible—but at least in the adequate cultivation of our own garden—at that moment we are hypnotised by the thought of blackshirts and gas-drill and goose-stepping into a Germanic monotony of glumness and rhetoric. We are making a present of our souls to Mussolini and Hitler when it is on the superiority of our souls that we rely for victory. I am far, far from suggesting that we should forget about the battle of ideas which at the moment has Spain for its arena, or that we should not take up the challenge; but that in taking it up we should be careful not to extinguish, but rather cultivate to the utmost, those qualities and activities

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on which all our claims are based. I do not say it is easy. I am only indicating the price we may have to pay if—putting actual war aside—we let our minds become enclosed in the mentality of war.

MARCH 1937

It was cheering to open one's *Times* the other day and find that the House of Commons had devoted some hours of debate to the preservation of beauty in town and country. Eighteen speeches were made, and all but one revealed a lively sense of the destruction and neglect which are spoiling Britain and the need of positive action on the part of the Government. The exception was the speech by the Government's spokesman, who put the onus of responsibility on the voluntary preservation societies, and suggested it was their duty to "educate" public opinion and persuade the local authorities to make use of their permissive powers.

On the day following the debate the Council for the Preservation of Rural England opened a new phase of its campaign at a luncheon presided over by Sir Lawrence Chubb. The National Trust has been promoting legislation to enable it to receive and preserve land or houses whose owners remain in occupation. The other societies are doing what they can in their various spheres of interest. No doubt we are right in asking them to exert their influence in creating public opinion, and it is just to point out that their campaign would be more effective if they joined forces and united their various organisations more closely. But it is unfair and utterly to misunderstand the magnitude of the problem to suggest that the whole initiative should rest with them, that it is they who ought to persuade impoverished local authorities to spend money they cannot afford, and that until they can rouse Britain to fever heat about the atrocities which are being committed the Government should not be expected to do anything.

The unanimity of the House of Commons on this question

(Ministers excepted) may itself be taken as some indication of public opinion. The destruction of buildings that ought to be preserved, the erection of buildings that ought to be forbidden, the toleration of ribbon development on roads and on the seashore, misdirected or rather undirected "development", the persistence of litter, casual road and rail construction, the destruction of trees and the planting of the wrong trees—all of these are various aspects of an evil which is not only painful to persons capable of explaining their tastes, but is also impoverishing the lives of the masses. The latter cannot be expected at this stage to rise up in protest against the piece-meal destruction of rural charm and architectural seemliness or to foresee its ultimate ill-effects on national character. If we are going to wait for a mass vote on the preservation of beauty we shall probably wait till it has been destroyed.

Sir Halford Mackinder has been saying that the preservation of rural beauty should be made a national, not a local, charge. Mr. Bossom asks the Government to appoint, as the first step to action for the preservation of buildings, an advisory committee composed of men like Sir Guy Dawber and Sir Lawrence Chubb. Mr. Keeling goes the whole way and asks for a central authority with positive planning functions, to make a survey of all the national resources and needs of the country and initiate a national plan for both town and country. Beauty has never been put to the test by those who create election cries. Is it inconceivable that these questions should be raised to the rank of a first-class issue and put to the country as a major plank in a political programme? The twentieth century is destroying the country as the nineteenth century destroyed the town, says Mr. Keeling. Is it certain that mass interest could not be aroused in this question, and that votes could not be won if the case for beauty were stated? But it ought not to be necessary to make the decision rest upon any such verdict. If the Government chose to act it would have the support of disinterested people of all parties.

Oxford University has now launched its big appeal "to the nation and to all English-speaking peoples" for funds to enable it to carry out essential schemes of equipment and endowment. In reading this appeal and studying Lord Halifax's speech one is struck by the fact that Oxford is casting its net more widely to-day than it has ever cared to do before. It is no longer merely a home for the humanities, but aims at covering the whole field of knowledge—both abstract knowledge, and knowledge that may be applied in modern politics, social work, industry, war, and medicine. There are some who may regret the arrival of these disturbing influences and the vanishing clostral atmosphere in which scholars gave their working time principally to Greek and Latin, philosophy, history, "and even, alas, theology". But such regrets are vain. A University is not a University unless all branches of learning may be studied there. The more complex knowledge becomes and the more specialised each separate field of inquiry the more indispensable it is to breadth and sanity of living that specialists should not live exclusively in grooves of their own, isolated from other intellectual interests. Lord Halifax made the high claim for the Universities that it is especially their business to maintain "true liberty of thought" when it is threatened, and to direct and defend "the progress of civilisation". That perhaps is not an exaggeration if we understand the work of the Universities to be not that of merely promoting knowledge and ideas from their own centres at any given moments, professorially, academically, but also of influencing a whole community of men and women who together will be responsible for the main job of running the country and propagating ideas.

If we think of their work in this way we see at once how important it is that Universities should not be turning out, on the one side, men of a narrowly scientific frame of mind, who will be prone to think—shall we say?—in a purely engineering way, or a medical way, or a biological way, or, on the other, men solely interested in what used to be known as the humanities. It is not desirable that the educated

world should be divided into two sets, one of which might wish at all costs to preserve an Adelphi Terrace because it is old and beautiful, and the other wish to destroy it because something more practically useful could be put in its place. A University, where studies must necessarily be specialised, exists at the same time to create a unity out of all branches of study, and to turn out men with an urbane sense of this unity. Oxford cannot afford to be without economics, biology, pathology, and other sciences which once she looked askance at; and if it should happen, as it happened at Cambridge under the influence of Mr. I. A. Richards, that the study of literature should come to be dominated by pathology, it may be regarded as a phase full of interest, and not without medicinal value.

Where, in this multiplicity of subjects which Oxford pursues, stands literature, English literature, the subject for which Mr. Stephen Potter has invented a new word—"Lit"—or, more precisely, "Eng Lit.", and academically "Lit. Ang."? No student of this subject at Oxford or any other University should neglect to read (is not that the proper "Lit." phrase?) his book, *The Muse in Chains*. Mr. Potter is of those disillusioned ones who, having entered adult life with an eager interest in poetry and the art and subject-matter of writing—in a word literature—"Sailed straight into the school of English Language and Literature" at Oxford, and soon found himself studying the "smooth poetical language" of the "poet's poet" with "the dispiriting apparatus of notes". If the author of the *Shepherd's Calendar*, so careful in his imitations, so sophisticated in his use of now familiar classic models, was indeed the "poet's poet", then must not he, Mr. Potter, have been "incurably prosaic, half-dead"? Or might it not be the case, as he surmises to-day, that Spenser is now certainly "the poet of Lit", the ideal subject-matter of the philologist, the grammarian, the seeker after literary sources, the analyst, the classifier, the industrious annotator and the informative lecturer?

Eng. Lit is an example of the interpretation of the greater by the lesser of great English writers by anecdotalists, antiquarians, hero-worshippers, pedants, and collectors

That is Mr. Potter's provisional definition of 'what he means by "Eng. Lit."—though he finds it will not do, since it leaves out of account the most important element—"the fog, the pervasiveness", the fact that it is "an attitude rather than an act, a tone of voice rather than a method of treatment". And so, to make his meaning perfectly clear, he devotes a whole book to exploring the *Lit* attitude of mind, back among its sources in Elizabethan times, back among the first professional lecturers on literature in Scotland in the eighteenth century, and arrives at Saintsbury, the sublime incarnation of the *Lit* spirit in modern times, and the foundation at Oxford of the School of English Language and Literature, with the bright light of Walter Raleigh revealing literature on the one side, and the laboratory workers exploiting *Lit. Ang.* on the other. Can literature be taught? Can taste be taught? But that was not the decisive question, which was "How can you *examine* in literature and taste?" and "What subjects will be gritty enough for specialists to teach and students to get their teeth into?" It is worth noting as a part of Mr. Potter's elaborate joke that he has himself explored the documents, sifted the history and analysed the types, characteristics, and modifications of *Lit* through the centuries in the perfect *Lit* manner, as if to say, "you see it is not because I cannot do this kind of thing myself".

Every University is faced with the problem. It is not as new as Mr. Potter seems to assume. It appeared, full-fledged, in the time of Aristotle, who had to lecture on the principles of poetic drama and on Rhetoric; and soon the whole of Greek literature was handed over to the tender mercies of the rhetoricians, the grammarians, the scholiasts who between them founded those studies on which English public school education is still largely based. But Oxford contrived to solve the problem so far as the classics were concerned. For students reading for classical Honours it

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cut down the period of philological study to about a year and a half; only one-third of the course was devoted to the study of classics in the pure *Lit* spirit; and in the final school of *Literae Humaniores* students were invited to explore the *subject-matter* of the classics—philosophy and history—and the forms of thought to which they subsequently led.

If Oxford could do this for the Greek and Roman classics, could it not do the same thing for English literature? Could it not give such instruction in the subject-matter and life of literature as would be useful to students other than those who are preparing to teach English literature or *Eng. Lit.* in schools? A few scores of specialists—probably not more—are needed to purify our texts for us and do the indispensable spade-work. But those who give their lives to research and in doing so render great services to literature will generally not be those to whom we shall look for literary criticism. The latter demands a catholic interest not in one period only, but in all periods of literature. Matthew Arnold was not a specialist. Walter Raleigh was not a specialist. They were critics. Saintsbury commands respect for his invaluable contribution to the history of the externals of literature, but his criticism, robust as it was, sometimes came near to the rankest philistinism. Edmund Gosse had much aptitude for criticism but little for pure literary scholarship. Posing as a scholar he once or twice got badly caught out. It is important to get rid of the superstition that a great faculty for research in the material of literature implies a faculty for interpreting literature itself. With his scholarly competence and nice satire Mr. Potter has effectively shown up the difference between the work of literature and the useful but more menial services of its professional acolytes.

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We have been told many times that New York is not America and that Paris is not France. It has ceased to be possible to assert with equal confidence that London is not

England. Sir Malcolm Stewart gave expert expression to our fears when he said that expansion in Greater London ought to be controlled to check the concentration of production there, and the Government is now appointing a Royal Commission to consider its growth. There have been psychological as well as economic reasons for the over-growth of London. If I were an industrialist, and considered my own comfort alone, I should like to have my factory in the suburbs of London rather than in a bleak northern city. If I were a senior officer in the Army or the Navy or the Air Force, I should think Sheerness, or Woolwich, or Ruislip (or Maidenhead for that matter) much more convenient places to visit—at least in peace time—than those distant, outlandish places now recommended by those who think that military depots should be placed where they could least easily be destroyed in war. The amenities of the area have been acting as a magnet.

London—or at least Greater London—is so many things. It is the greatest seaport in the world. It is the greatest financial and commercial centre. It is becoming, if it is not already, the greatest manufacturing region. It is the political capital both for Great Britain and the Empire. It has the biggest University. The value of the possessions in its museums exceeds, I believe, the value of all the other public collections in the country put together. Though it lacks a National Theatre, it is the centre of the nation's drama; and though it lacks a National Opera, a considerable proportion of the musical life of the country is there. Coronations take place in London, Courts are held there, and "the Season" is something that still counts, though its real season never stops, unless it be in August, and even then not wholly. The national newspapers are made and edited in London. The termini of all the railways are there. Hotels, restaurants, stores, night-clubs, headquarters of societies, clubs for propagandists and conspirators, Broadcasting House—no need to prolong the list—what is there, apart from basic industries, bathing, beauty spots, and ancient monuments, that does not look to London for its centre,

or tend to be bigger and supposedly better when it is there?

But now at last a consciously directed movement is on foot towards decentralisation, towards checking this disturbing flow of population southwards, and reviving healthy activities in the provinces. There was a time, not so very many years ago, when to go northwards—to Lancashire, Yorkshire, or Tyneside, however distressing to the eye their sprawling factory towns—was to feel oneself breathing a keener, brisker air, amid a life far more strenuous and alert than that of the South. One could detect the consciousness of prosperity and pride of local patriotism in the pages of the great provincial newspapers, which still courageously retain the finer characteristics of British journalism, though they have a hard struggle to exist against those ubiquitous national journals which come from London.

But the Coronation ceremonies—the *fêtes du Couronnement*, as our French visitors call it—will make London in this coming spring more than ever the hub of Britain. No need to talk of the all-too-manifest preparations which are being made to receive visitors from the provinces and the world. London, and afterwards the rest of Britain, will this year be on show for the inspection and criticism of foreigners from all countries. The majority of them, no doubt, will investigate such lighter amusements as London, in its least sad mood, will not fail to provide. But the more critical—and it is the more critical in the long run who count—will want to know what we talk about and what we read, what sort of pictures we have to show, what music may be heard, what drama we have in our theatres. They will expect to find, for example, Shakespeare as much appreciated in England as he used to be in Germany. And certainly, if they read the papers, they will see his name mentioned often enough. Only the other day the Shoreditch Housing Association invoked the magic name, and *The Times* informed us that if Shakespeare himself could visit the new workers' flats "in less than no time he would have all the tenants chatting freely and all the children hanging round him" (a deduction, clearly, from internal evidence).

But talk about Shakespeare is all to the good if it is sometimes translated into action. An association of Englishmen (aided by Americans) are seeking to dedicate to Shakespeare places in London connected with his name, and are busy with a plan to rebuild on the Southwark bank of the Thames the old Globe Theatre and the Mermaid Tavern, and to construct in their vicinity a great Elizabethan building to contain a library, museum, hall and club rooms—a most pleasing scheme which, if it materialises, should be an excellent contribution to the still bigger schemes which must soon be prepared for the reconstruction of the south bank of the Thames.

Already, of course, in the full vigour of life, we have the "Old Vic," which for so long and so faithfully, with its productions of plays and its loyal audiences, has been rendering much more than lip service to the appreciation of Shakespeare. In the West End, also, I believe it is the case that there have been more productions of Shakespeare in recent years than at any other period in this century. Only the other day Mr. Gielgud's *Hamlet* and *Romeo and Juliet* were quickly followed by *As You Like It*, with Miss Edith Evans as Rosalind, and that by *The Taming of the Shrew*. We see the influence of the "Old Vic" reasserting itself in the West End. I wish that the foreigners who will be in London in May could see Mr. Esmé Church's production of *As You Like It* just as it was done at the New Theatre, with Miss Evans so perfectly interpreting the inner, essential Shakespeare. For what she did was to be not merely Rosalind, but, in being Rosalind, to bring us also to the very heart of Shakespearean drama, to give us Shakespeare himself—which is not so impossible as it sounds, since in all but the earliest of his plays it is not a great exaggeration to say that the whole of him is discoverable in every part. Never have I seen Rosalind so perfectly interpreted, with the absolutely right combination of mockery and passion, delicately, exquisitely impassioned laughter that was near, but not too near, the brink of tears. What Miss Evans made me feel more than any other actor or actress I have ever

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seen was not merely that she could make a great part out of a Shakespearean character, but that her mind was really in tune with that of the dramatist. That appeared negatively as well as positively. Note the restraint with which she subdued her playing in the opening scenes, and gave the centre of the stage to Celia.

MAY 1937

The London Mercury is offering no Special Souvenir Coronation Number; this is simply the number which appears in the month of the Coronation. In an article on later pages Mr. G. M. Young turns the attention of an historian and a detached observer of the contemporary scene to the event of the moment so far as it is forecast, explained, or discussed in recently published books. In undertaking this task Mr. Young became the recipient of I know not how many parcels of assorted literature which the publishers had sent us. He must have lived in the odour of sanctity for weeks. If there was anything he did not know beforehand about the history of kings and queens, about the ceremony of crowning, about the habits and hobbies of princes and princesses, he knows it now. Readers of the *Mercury* who have marvelled at the long-drawn-out labours of the carpenters and decorators who have been turning London into a sort of gigantic Colosseum should have spared a thought for the greater labours of those who have written all these books, and for Mr. Young who has read them.

Beyond this the *Mercury* has made no dedicatory offering to the occasion. We have assumed that just as persons must eat, wash, walk, rest, dress, and pursue some routine of life during this month of May, so too our readers will expect from us such fare as we should offer at normal times. In this performance the words "God Save the King" will come once, but at the beginning rather than the end, so that there will be no awkward suspense when the curtain is about to

fall. "Business as usual" was the sanguine motto adopted at the beginning of the war. "Business, recreation, reflection as nearly as possible as usual, but not quite" is ours.

I say "not quite", for, apart from the impressions which some millions of persons will derive from seeing or reading about the ceremony and pageantry, there may be a good deal to be turned to advantage by the nation in other ways. Let us recognise certain facts. There are as many ways of reacting to the Coronation as there are temperaments and understandings. There are some who approach it simply as Mr. Baldwin appears to do, or the Archbishop of Canterbury. For them it is a ceremony not so much consolidating the Crown in the affections of the people as a function of State, an impressive ritual, confirming authority as formally vested in the head of the Church and State but actually wielded by ecclesiastics on the one side and the Prime Minister on the other. To produce the full effect, the whole orchestra of authoritative opinion as expressed through the voices of the Church, the Prime Minister, Parliament, and the responsible Press must be massed in organised unanimity, so that no one can have any doubt that authority, in this democratic country, is at one and the same time of divine right *and popular*. This, I think, is more or less the official view, in accordance with which the person of the monarch has ritual value in proportion as he has, visibly, just the prescribed attributes and no personality in excess.

There are others who, more simply, with more faith, find in this magnificent function a mystical consummation of British constitutional history, the person of the King being a splendid symbol of the unity of the nation and the Empire.

There are some who do not look further than the fact that Royalty is a valuable asset, and that Coronations draw foreign visitors and stimulate trade.

There are some who do not bother about it one way or the other, but like a show.

There are some who without knowing it believe in the divine right of Kings in the same way that they believe in the

divine right of peers and peeresses and the divine right of film stars.

There are some who remember that Coronation Day will not be a holiday for those who are fighting in Spain

And there are some, perhaps a majority, who are so disconcerted by the precipitate fall of one popular King that they feel some constraint in the acclamation of another—the transition is so sudden. But they are prepared to do their best.

And then there is the King himself, and the Queen, and the Queen-Mother. What do they think and feel?

There is one thing we may be quite certain about—that there was no man in England more distressed about the abdication of the late King than King George VI himself, that there could be no job more uncomfortable to take over than that which has fallen to him. What will be a show for most of the world on May 12th will be a terrific ordeal for him and the Queen. Whatever doubts any of us may have about the rights and wrongs of what has happened are shared by them. But theirs is the burden, not ours. The King is not a man of great physical strength. An immense personal strain will be put on him on Coronation Day, and not only on that day but on many days following. Some of those who are arranging functions have been far too willing to accept duties on his behalf which are almost certainly excessive. Which of us will not, on Coronation Day, have a feeling more personal than that of loyalty for the King when we think of his personal ordeal and the bewildering duties he has to perform?

I was suggesting that there may be certain advantages to be derived from the Coronation—that it may provide certain opportunities of social gain which should not be missed. Among those whose business it is to inject impressions into the public mind there has been a colossal “open conspiracy” to create a certain atmosphere, a mass condition favourable to impressions of pleasure and happiness. That is, when you come to think of it, a rare and amazing thing—official authority and the Press uniting

their influence to make us think in the mass, not of war or trade competition or murder or poisoning, but of sounds and sights designed to touch the emotions and give pleasure. Has ever such a thing happened in our time before? Is there not a sort of feudal charm about it, as when some great lord of the manor, well disposed towards all his tenants, invited them to festivities and conferred boons on them?

But in our case, as we have arrived at the high estate of democracy, all of us participate in the privileges and responsibilities of the lord, and are invited according to our powers to co-operate in conferring boons. Thus we have been most sensibly asked to decorate our houses, to put flowers in our gardens and in window boxes, to plant trees, local authorities have been adjured to attend to local amenities; employers have been asked to give holidays with pay; the hotels have been exhorted to increase their bath-room accommodation; railway travel is to be made more comfortable; roads better, motor driving more considerate; pictures are to be bought; books read; magazines like the *Mercury* are to be seen in every self-respecting home. I was touched to discover that Lady Oxford had caught the prevailing mood, and in a letter to *The Times* was backing Sir Thomas Inskip's suggestion that the iron railings should be removed from the gardens in West End London squares. Lady Oxford herself has lived in four London squares, and I feel that her gesture is in the spirit of those who under the stress of disinterested emotion have been known to tear the jewellery from their necks to give to some deserving cause.

But note—authority is behind all this. We have a right to expect that it will itself participate in the spirit it has fostered. *Panem et circenses*? Yes, in a better sense of the term. For example, the sale of Crown property available for a National Theatre at a reduced price; relaxation of entertainment tax in the interest of the living drama; more vigorous steps to prevent the extension of ribbon development on roads; preparation of measures for national town-planning. The idea that ought not to be lost sight of at

M A Y 1 9 3 7

this favourable moment is that the provision of amenities should be as much a matter of national policy as the prevention of abuses.

J U L Y 1 9 3 7

To persons who have asked why this magazine is called "The *London Mercury*", and not the "English" or "British" Mercury, the answer has been simply that it is published from London—London not being a bad observation-point from which to look out upon the world. And especially this year, when so many foreigners from all lands have been there, giving us their views about England and imparting their information about their own countries. But on this occasion—the Coronation and all those things being over—I find myself at another observation-point. I am writing these notes in the city of Athens.

Athens is not so far away as it used to be, if we measure distance in terms of time and in terms of ideas. In passing through France, Switzerland, northern Italy, and down the Adriatic and the Gulf of Corinth, and here again in Athens, it seemed to me—through no fault of mine—that all the people I met were talking much of the time about just the same things that we have been compelled to talk about in London. The perspective, of course, was different. In Venice it happened that they had no choice but to talk about one of our favourite English topics—for the Duke of Windsor turned up there just when I did. I had scarcely been five minutes in my first gondola when my attention was drawn to a small motor launch which passed within a few yards and landed its passengers close by. I was being favoured with an unexpected close-up view of the Duke and the Duchess, the former looking very robust and energetic as he got up to hand the Duchess out of the boat.

Events don't often arrange themselves so neatly to point one's moral. I had just emerged from a train, where strangers had been asking about "your King"—the present

or the late King—and here was the latter in the flesh, complete with Duchess, as if the two had been conjured up for my convenience, like an illustration in a lantern lecture. The reporters and photographists have been following them everywhere; the newspapers, the radio, and the cinema have got busy, and the mechanism of publicity has made it possible for all the world to experience the same sentiment. All the details of that conflict in England last November were minutely followed as far away as Jugoslavia, Greece, or even Turkey; an average middle-class person in any of those countries knew just as much about the sequence of facts as we did in England, and was just as much interested.

But knowledge of the social background was wanting, and therefore the interpretation of the facts was different. A king, however conditioned, is always a king, whether he be Agamemnon or Macbeth or Edward VIII; but who, outside the British Empire, will quite understand the British Constitution, or the position of the Prime Minister, or that mysterious thing that used to be called the "Non-conformist conscience"? And how try and make a foreigner understand just what these mean or how they work? An Italian who travels much, knows many languages, and constantly reads the newspapers of several countries, told me the other day, with a knowing look, that he was not ignorant of the fact that the real ruler of England, the power constantly behind the throne is—the Archbishop of Canterbury! One was given a flesh-creeping impression—this perspicacious Italian saw the far-reaching tentacles of a ubiquitous, obscurantist Church with an organised army of conspiring clergy holding England in a relentless grip and directing our policy. How explain that that is not so without transporting him to England and making him live there?

Everywhere, I was saying, people are talking about the same set of facts—the British throne, the war in Spain, the fear of war in general, the trade revival, economic nationalism, fascism and anti-fascism, and also film stars, aeroplanes, radio. They have their eyes on Hitler, Mussolini,

Blum, Neville Chamberlain, Roosevelt, Henry Ford, and one or two luminaries of Hollywood. All desire peace—peace first—better trade, fewer taxes, and more pleasure. All, as in England, are profoundly concerned about foreign affairs and matters of common European interest—that is to say, they are thinking internationally as never before. And yet, with their minds rooted in the tradition of their own countries, they cannot easily penetrate to those other states of mind which rest on other traditions. At the first glance internationalism seems to have taken us most of the way along the same road; and then we find ourselves up against certain incompatibilities of habit and tradition; and these become insuperable obstacles to understanding when the Press is not free and the more enlightened minds cannot exert their proper influence.

In Greece, it seems to me, one finds oneself in an atmosphere where the intellectual and social barriers are less formidable than in many countries nearer to us. This, I suppose, is partly due to history and partly to the Greek temperament. In spite of the present dictatorship and in spite of difficulties in the time of King Constantine the tradition of friendship between Britain and Greece has lasted. Byron is not forgotten, nor British sympathy in the Cretan war of independence and the intimate relationship that subsisted throughout the Venizelist régime. Externally the Greeks might seem to be more like the French than the English—the newer streets of Athens are modelled on Parisian streets; the café life is as animated as it is in France; the people are as vivacious and talkative. But their demeanour suggests a sort of gentleness or amiability which makes them sympathetic to British feeling. Educated Greeks are quick to seize an English point of view—perhaps because to some extent they have been *taught* similar ideas. One should add, they are as hospitable as the Americans—a rare thing in this continent of Europe.

Then, of course, any Englishman with some classical education feels a sort of possessiveness in regard to Greece just as he does in the Holy Land. He has mastered the

ancient geography through reading Greek literature in the one case and the Bible in the other. Such an Englishman will have his mind on an earlier civilisation when he first sights Corcyra and the Gulf of Corinth, or approaches the Piræus with Salamis on his left and Aegina on his right. The amazing contours of the mountains, with the light picking out delicate shades of colour on their rocky slopes, provide a satisfying background not only because of the intrinsic beauty of their curves and their generous variety, but also because each peak bears a familiar magic name—Pentelicon, Hymettos, Cyllene, Acro-Corinth, and, nearer, the isolated heights of Lycabettos, the Pnyx, and the Acropolis itself.

Inevitably one is distressed by much of the modern building in the Piræus and in the environs of Athens itself. One is appalled at the manner in which the open land south of the harbour has had dumped on it an untidy mess of villa dwellings thrown up higgledy-piggledy on the dessicated soil without the least apparent regard to plan; the reasonable excuse being that accommodation had to be found in a hurry a few years ago for scores of thousands of refugees from Turkey. Southwards between the Bay of Phalerum and Mount Hymettos the suburbs have crept out with as little consideration for the amenities of Attica as we in England have shown for the South Downs or the integrity of the Sussex coast. Ribbon development is going on along the roads to Eleusis and to Sunium. Well, there is no reason why we should expect the Greeks to do better in these respects, after so short an experience of freedom, than we are doing with a thousand years behind us. Rather, one should gratefully call attention to the improvements they have been making in and near the centre of Athens, and the care they are now bestowing on their ancient monuments. A very pleasant modern city is growing up in the vicinity of the King's Palace and the adjoining gardens.

The Acropolis for me in no way fell short of expectation, though if one would capture the sense of its past, one must

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think away the modern Athens that lies below it, and recreate its features in the spirit of the ruins that stand out so clearly in the pure air. One must introduce into the picture, surely, more trees, more green. There were soft turf and plane-trees on the banks of the Ilissos when, in the *Phaedrus*, Socrates sat enjoying the breeze and talking philosophy.

Work is being done to improve the approach to the Propylaea. We need fear no further neglect of the Acropolis. One wishes that one could see the Elgin marbles in their original position on the Parthenon, but I do not ask that we should make the gesture of restoring them to Greece. That they owe their preservation to England is an argument which would not weigh with me if I were convinced that their proper place to-day is on the ruin—for a ruin it is, though a splendid one—of the Parthenon. But what matters most is that these sculptures should be preserved for ever in absolute security, unexposed to the weather, where they will be most accessible to students and easily visible in all their detail. Moreover, the art of ancient Greece does not belong peculiarly to modern Greece, but to all the world. The marbles, perhaps, are safest in the British Museum. There is scarcely more reason for restoring them to Greece than for sending our Raphaels or Leonardos to Italy. None the less, I admit I should like to have seen them in their original setting on the Parthenon.

AUGUST 1937

When I was about to begin these notes it was still uncertain whether the National Shakespeare Memorial Theatre Committee would have succeeded in buying the site which it wished to acquire for the National Theatre, or whether the Government would have sold it for a trifle more to a commercial competitor. I had hoped that by the time this magazine was in circulation it would have been announced that the island site at Cromwell Gardens,

South Kensington, had been made secure for the Committee, and that it would be possible to go ahead at once with the task that had been delayed for 29 years. But now we are informed that the Commissioner of Works and Public Buildings, putting aside the Committee's tender, have accepted a slightly higher offer from a client of Messrs. Harrods. "Redevelopment", it is understood, is contemplated, and the erection of shops.

So the Government has refused to give even the smallest assistance to the Committee in its task of providing London with a National Theatre. In 1925 the Committee had reconciled itself to a decision of the Government not to provide a site from Crown property. Having about £150,000 at its disposal, and concluding that it could not make an effective appeal for more funds until it could present a tangible scheme—including a complete architect's plan for a building on a specified site, and the promise of actual production in a theatre at an early date—the Committee began the search for a site which it could purchase itself. Inquiries were made within the recognised circle of theatreland. But the cost proved prohibitive. The Committee was forced to look elsewhere.

At last it discovered the island site in Cromwell Gardens, which was Crown property, and for sale. It is made accessible by broad roads, omnibus services, and two converging systems of underground railways. It is immediately opposite the Victoria and Albert Museum, for which a public-spirited Government in 1899 paid £80,000, and is near the Albert Hall, the Imperial Institute, the Royal Colleges of Music, Science and Art, and the Natural History Museum. "Among the mummies", someone said to me pessimistically. Well—that was a possible line of criticism. Agreed, Cromwell Gardens may not be the absolutely ideal site, but it is a good one, and it had passed the tests of theatre experts.

A definite offer was then made to purchase this property from the Government. It was rejected on the ground that anything less than the maximum sum which might be

realised by putting it up for competitive tender would amount to a concealed subsidy, which the Cabinet would not agree to. That London would stand to gain by the erection of a fine building in a commanding position such as this, that the nation as a whole would be enriched by the encouragement of drama through a National Theatre—no such considerations as these weighed against the possibility of the loss of a small fraction of the maximum purchase price. A block of flats, a garage, or a National Theatre—these were all one so far as the Government were concerned—it's your money we want, was in effect the reply. I am not suggesting that this was the view of the First Commissioner of Works himself, or of any official directly concerned. But that was the policy laid down by the decision of the Cabinet. There was no getting away from it.

The Committee was thus put in the position of having to play a sort of game of poker with unknown commercial rivals, who might outbid it. It had to play this game with money which was in its trust. Should it put in a tender to the amount of the valuation which its expert valuers had supplied? Supposing it were outbid by £5,000 or £10,000, and so lost the game? Bidding in the dark, it was inevitably tempted to offer a little more than the estimated value—possibly too much, in which case its capital was unnecessarily diminished, possibly just too little, in which case it lost the site. It bid just too little.

Such has been the attitude of the State in this country to the movement to establish a National Theatre.

Let us turn, by way of contrast, from the action of the State in regard to a National Theatre to its action in regard to Avebury. There were two pieces of luck on the side of the plan for preserving Avebury. First, its interest is primarily archaeological—it is an English tradition to be respectful to arts of great antiquity—scheduled “historical monuments”, for example, must be of earlier origin than the eighteenth century. Secondly, the Office of Works had the good fortune to have Mr. Ormsby-Gore as First Commissioner; it was under his encouraging influence that a

scheme was prepared under the Town and Country Planning Act, 1932, for the planning of the village of Avebury and its surroundings. This scheme is now ready and the National Trust is collecting subscriptions on behalf of the joint authority which is to administer it.

The plan deserves a blessing for two reasons. First, and obviously, it ensures the preservation of the neolithic remains and the continuance of the work of uncovering and re-erecting the imposing stones which constitute the circles and the great avenue—that is to say, it performs a duty to archæology. Secondly, it is heedful of purely æsthetic considerations; it is tender to the modern beauty of the village of Avebury, and regardful of the fact that this is bound up with its relationship to a broad landscape. Who that has stood on the ancient mounds which encircle the village has failed to be impressed by the combination of art and nature in the use of circles—the circles formed by the stones and the mounds, and concentric with them the vast circles of the downs that form the horizon on every side—the geometric arrangements of stones, mounds, hills, sky, and at certain times also the sun or the moon? The preservation of the essential Avebury as a thing to delight the eye and impress the imagination demanded the preservation of that expanse of surrounding country. That is not forgotten in this admirable scheme.

How is it that the Government, acting in one of its functions through an Office of Works and a Mr. Ormsby-Gore, can play so helpful a part in encouraging an archæological and æsthetic scheme such as that for Avebury, while on another occasion its behaviour is so uninstructed and barbarous? I think the answer is that there is no permanent body having a position comparable to that of the Office of Works, instructed and humane, on which it relies for advice in matters of taste. The Cabinet, invited to give a hurried decision on such a question as the sale of a site for a National Theatre, never gives its real attention to such a matter; it follows the line of least resistance, and that line is seldom favourable to projects of a non-utilitarian character.

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We need a Minister of Public Amenities, with accomplished civil servants behind him, to advise the Cabinet on this and a host of other questions which to-day are so dangerously neglected.

SEPTEMBER 1937

Since I wrote last month the situation has been completely reversed in regard to the National Shakespeare Memorial Theatre Committee and the coveted site in South Kensington. Then it appeared that the Committee had been out-bid and that the Government had agreed to sell the site, which was Crown property, to a commercial competitor. This disturbing result has been averted by the public-spirited withdrawal of the successful candidate and by the willingness of the Government to accept the withdrawal—that is how I understand the matter. The upshot is that the National Theatre gets the site at the price it had offered—£75,000.

The general issue which supporters of the Theatre will soon be asked to consider is discussed by Mr. James Bridie on later pages. I am glad to be able to “bequeath the argument” to him; but there are one or two supplementary points I should like to allude to. For instance, I have been asked why a site has not been chosen in the heart of what is known as theatre land. The answer is quite simple—the cost is prohibitive. Such a site is not to be had for any sum of money that is likely to be available. And again, why should not plays be put on for a National Theatre company at some existing theatre which could be rented for the purpose? Apart from the fact that the terms of the trust do not permit this—a difficulty which might be overcome—it should be remembered that the National Theatre is intended to be a permanent institution; it is desirable that it should have a building made to its needs; and owning would be much less costly than hiring.

These are bare economic considerations. They show the conclusive arguments against Leicester Square or Piccadilly,

but not those in favour of the museum district of South Kensington. I will not enlarge upon the latter point. I would not suggest that any site more than a thousand yards from Leicester Square is the ideal one, but I may leave it to the Appeal Committee to prove that South Kensington is the nearest to the ideal outside the charmed circle of commercial drama, and that if in its dramatic work it fulfils its function it will no more depend on the favours of the local residential rest-houses than the Old Vic depends on dwellers in Waterloo Road or than Nigel Playfair's Lyric depended on Hammersmith Broadway.

To the question "Who is to be the Director?" no answer is yet forthcoming. It is easy to say Granville-Barker, whom every pre-war playgoer remembers as the inspiring Director of the Court Theatre experiment, and every Shakespearean admires for his practical exposition of Shakespeare's technique and his endearing poetic interpretation. But Mr. Granville-Barker himself keeps on saying No, and if he should persist it must be presumed he means it—and I doubt whether we can pass an Act of Parliament to compel him to take on the job, or whether it would be seemly to send a deputation to implore him to do so. If he should willingly take it on, good. If not, he should be persuaded to give his help in some other form and advise the Board in the selection of a number of producers—including younger men like, say, Mr. Tyrone Guthrie—one of whom may eventually turn out to be the inevitable leader of the movement.

But why do we need a National Theatre, some people ask us, when already we have the Old Vic? I suggest that we need a National Theatre all the more because we have an Old Vic—that the Old Vic has helped to create the taste and the demand which make a National Theatre desirable, just as in the past the Abbey Theatre in Dublin and Miss Horniman's theatre in Manchester helped to create a demand for good plays; and to-day every sincere experiment such as that of the Mercury Theatre or the Gate Theatre leads more people to ask for more drama

where something feeding to the spirit is attempted. A liking for Shakespeare does not destroy a liking for Aeschylus. A taste for Shelley is not antagonistic to a taste for Keats. The popularity of Shaw never militated against the popularity of Wells. Mr. Auden is not destructive to Mr. T. S. Eliot, or Mr. Isherwood to Mr. Auden. The more people there are who go to the Old Vic the more there will be who will go to a National Theatre (if it is ably conducted). In the fulfilment of their respective functions they would not compete against each other as rivals, but reinforce each other in jointly competing against their common enemy, the cheap meretricious drama which makes no demands on the dwarfed intellect and stirs no deep emotions.

There is one and only one way in which they might be real competitors. They might be rivals in their appeals for funds. That is a serious matter, and might be very damaging to the Old Vic, and so indirectly to the National Theatre itself. Surely this might be overcome by a simple, bold, and generous device—generous on both sides. Let the appeal, when it is made, be a joint one, with an explicit statement that a percentage of all the new contributions should be paid into the Old Vic Fund. If that were done the two would become fast friends and allies for life.

When all is said and done, what is it that we really want—supposing us to be sincere, and we must suppose that some of the people are sincere—when we talk about a National Theatre? I suggest that we put it the other way round. What is there that we miss in the theatre as we get it? Or what is it that we sometimes get, but so seldom? One recalls a few of those rarer occasions which made more than a passing impression on the mind and remain ineffaceably in our memory—a very early, long-ago experience such as one had, say, in seeing William Poel's *Everyman*—or the Habima players in the *Dybbuk*—some scenes at least in Granville-Barker's *Twelfth Night*—and one came near the right thing in at least two *Hamlets* (Forbes-Robertson playing on one occasion, Mr. Gielgud on another), and very, very near to it in that last *As You Like It* with Miss Edith Evans

so divinely excelling herself. When one recalls these and a number of other memorable experiences, we ask how is it that we may go to the theatre again and again and see well-recommended plays and leave without any of that satisfaction which we feel we ought to be able to derive from at least one or two theatres in London at any given time.

And now we have Mr. Bridic reminding us that of the many brilliant and sincere writers in Britain to-day few are writing for the stage, and when they do write for the stage their work is not wanted. There is clearly something wrong here. Is it that the writers are at fault in not making their works truly dramatic, or the theatre in not wanting the best? Or are both at fault, the one being too *literary*, the other, skilled in stage technique, scornful of literature, wrapt up exclusively in the business of getting effects over the footlights.

"The theatre, if it is to survive, needs poets", says Mr Granville-Barker, in the Romanes Lecture *On Poetry in Drama* which has just been published. "Plays only defy mortality when they deal—as poetry in its essence does—with the things that are immortal". By poetry he means, of course, far more than verse. As composition it will be "patterned language", but in its essence it will be, in Shelley's words, "the expression of the imagination and that which lifts the veil from the hidden beauty of the world". That is romanticist language which will not please everyone. But the poetic experience does not need to be defined to be known. It is the reality within this experience that Mr. Granville-Barker wants to bring into the life of the theatre; and he sees that it cannot be introduced by the writer who is a poet and no more; it is not enough to have mastered the art of poetry; "in drama we cannot have the spirit without the body"; the dramatist must work in a given medium, through the persons of actors moving on the stage before an audience. The new poet-dramatists should "let themselves drift back into the arms of the theatre as they find it", and he adds: "if these arms are open (that I know is a question)". Mr. Yeats felt that they were not

open, and therefore helped to found the Abbey Theatre. It is because they are so often closed in the commercial theatre of London that one demands a National Theatre. And for the same reason one must urge that the programme should allow as much time for the production of the best modern work as of Shakespeare and the classics.

But certainly it should not be allowed to become an experimenting ground for a kind of composition which passes as "serious drama"—which is often good literature but not good drama. The Elizabethans had the supreme good fortune to experience the vivifying force of the classical Renaissance before writers were infected by its pedantry. The misunderstanding of Aristotle by the neo-classicists has left its lasting mark on dramatic literature to this day, even when the old rules are discarded. Aristotle never professed to be treating of drama in all its forms—he was only concerned with that aspect of it in which it was dramatic poetry. Perhaps I may venture to use words that I have written before. Being concerned primarily with poetry, he "taught the intellectual world to think of drama as an almost exclusively literary thing. It is due in great measure to this one-sidedness of the *Poetics* that cultured people, everywhere and always, have tended too much to think of 'serious' drama in terms of that part of drama which belongs to literature. And naturally the converse has come to be true, that those whose practical business is with the stage—with production, with acting, with stage-effects, with all that hits the public—tend to be separated from intellectual influences, and to behave as if that part of drama which Aristotle did not discuss is the only important thing for men whose business is to fill a theatre".

That gulf it is surely the function of a National Theatre to bridge. It will have to convince us that while the essence of drama lies in the inner action of the play it is a composite art in which the playwright, the producer, the actors, the scene-makers, and perhaps the musicians, contribute inseparable elements which work together to affect the minds and emotions of an audience.

"Aggregate circulation of the eight national dailies", writes that pithy and informative journal, *World's Press News*, "is at present approximately 10,260,400". (This figure excludes the two financial papers, but includes the picture papers.) Astronomical figures have lost their power of surprising us. Remembering telephones, radio, films, and other ubiquitous novelties we may keep our surprise for the fact that so modern a thing as the contemporary newspaper has so comparatively distant an ancestry. *The Morning Post*, whose decease has been recently lamented, was founded in 1772. *The Times*, under the name of the *Daily Universal Register*, was first published in 1785. It was between those two dates that the shrewd if not very inspiring poet, George Crabbe, invoking the contemporary newspaper, wrote.

To you all readers turn, and they can look
 Pleased on a paper, who abhor a book;
 Those, who ne'er deign'd their Bible to peruse,
 Would think it hard to be denied their news.

It might not occur to us, studying Lord Beaverbrook's recent pronouncements, to think of the *Daily Express* as entering into close competition with the Bible. The circulation of the *Daily Express* is nearly two and a half millions. "I estimate", says Lord Beaverbrook, "that there are 6,000,000 homes in Britain which take a national newspaper. If we are to achieve perfection, therefore, we have 3,500,000 homes to enter before our task is done". Lord Beaverbrook, believing in himself, thinks that the road to perfection lies in the introduction of six million copies of his organ into six million British homes—that is, in imposing his rendering of the news of the world and his opinion of it on the minds of the whole nation. Mussolini, Stalin, Hitler, have similar self-confidence.

But we have not yet reached that millennium. There are still seven and a half million copies of other national journals disputing the way, to say nothing of the provincial

journals which, each in its own locality, cling doggedly on against great odds, contributing far more to the formation of public opinion than the small figures of their circulation would indicate. In London, apart from the two-penny *Times* and apart from the picture papers, Lord Beaverbrook has still to reckon with the *Daily Mail*, the *Daily Herald*, the *News Chronicle*, and, last but by no means least, the *Daily Telegraph*. Lord Camrose's paper certainly gives us food for thought. Here is a journal, not long ago priced at two-pence, which has boldly entered the penny field and stuck to its guns in preserving its two-penny character; it aims at presenting a balanced account of the news fully and representatively, soberly, but not dully, making, it is true, due concessions to most of the human frailties, but without the fireworks, the fussy, confusing glitter of headlines, the catch-penny make-up which the other penny papers, copying one another, and relying upon a convention and a routine of their own making, serve up as "what the public wants". Lord Camrose has had the courage of his convictions, and he has succeeded. His journal is now well on the way towards the three-quarters of a million mark, and probably will not stop there. His paper has proved the case for the older style of journalism when adapted to modern life. In saying this it must not be supposed that I am offering any bouquet to its political opinions or its social judgments. I am speaking of it only as a piece of journalism conducted in accordance with a sober journalistic tradition.

This brings me to the question of its recent absorption of the *Morning Post*—a journal which had also come down to a penny, and was making a similar effort to retain the "two-penny" character but did not succeed in the same way in pushing up its circulation. In the course of the libel action brought by Lord Camrose last month a good deal was said about the amalgamation of the *Daily Telegraph* and the *Morning Post*—more properly described as the absorption of the latter. Now the swallowing of one national newspaper by another is a serious matter which

Fleet Street regards as a major disaster in its journalistic life. A London newspaper employs an immense number of journalists, printers, advertisement men, travellers, and men and women engaged on its publishing and clerical staff, and a sudden closing down throws all these persons out of employment. The number of national newspapers is reduced from seven to six (excluding the financial and picture papers), and the field of employment for journalists engaged on them is therefore reduced by approximately one seventh. But even that, tragic as it may be for some individuals, is not the most serious element in the disaster from the national point of view. We are confronted with a further reduction in those few types of opinion which are represented in national daily journalism; one more minority is sacrificed; though I seldom agreed with the politics of the *Morning Post*, I recognise that it was a journal which honestly represented a distinctive minority view, and as such ought not to be deprived of a hearing in a democratic community.

To say this is not to make any complaint against Lord Camrose. If he had not bought the paper, it would have died. Rather, what demands consideration is the tendency of the daily Press to become concentrated in fewer and fewer hands, with less opportunity for minorities, often intellectual minorities, to find a hearing—the tendency towards intellectual totalitarianism, with the finer and subtler elements always in danger of being squeezed out.

That, indeed, is a serious situation in a democracy. During the course of a single generation we have witnessed the elimination of the *Standard*, the *Westminster Gazette*, the *Morning Leader*, the *Daily Chronicle*, and now the *Morning Post*; and in the provinces the position of half a dozen independent papers with splendid traditions is gravely threatened. It is easy to account for the change—the ever-mounting expenses which make it impossible to maintain the services of a daily paper except on the basis of a gigantic circulation, and a corresponding advertisement revenue. The present tendency, increasing, will mean more and more the concentration of the power of

the daily Press in a few hands, more and more the elimination of minority ways of thinking. The "freedom" of the daily Press will become the freedom of six men; and when or if the *Daily Express* achieves "perfection", it will be the freedom of one man.

I have been asked, what has been happening to the King's Medal for Poetry?—awarded for the first time in 1935 (for the year 1934) to Mr. Laurence Whistler. A long time has elapsed without any further award. The delay has made a good many persons suppose that none of the younger poets have produced anything which in the opinion of the committee deserved commendation. We have been asked whether it is the case that none of the poets who have been so much before us in the last year or two—W. H. Auden, Stephen Spender, Day Lewis, Frederic Prokosch, Ruth Pitter, Louis MacNeice, William Empson (to name only some of those who are qualified under the rules)—have been held to have justified their title to rank side-by-side with Mr. Laurence Whistler. Among the work produced in this period there has been a good deal that has been more than "novel", or "original", which has struck a distinctive note and compelled us to think again about some of our fundamental conceptions of poetry, not of course, with the effect of altering those fundamental conceptions, but modifying our view as to how its aims may be attained. Granted that there has been much which is artificial and unpoetic, much that is derivative from T. S. Eliot and traceable in some cases to his mannerisms more than his merits, much that is mere mimicry and in accordance with the fashions of a clique, none the less I should have been surprised if the committee responsible for the award had not been able to sift the wheat from the chaff and find it in its heart to give the Medal.

I now learn, however, that a decision regarding the award for 1936 was arrived at by the committee some months ago, though the announcement has been delayed.

The conditions are: "the medal will be given either for a poet's first or second volume of verse, or to a poet still under 35 years of age". The committee consists of the Poet Laureate, Mr. Walter de la Mare, Professor Gilbert Murray, and Dr. I. A. Richards, who between them certainly represent more than one critical stand-point. The violent clash between the younger poets of to-day and the poets who were young twenty years ago must have added to the difficulties of a choice difficult in any case. If it were desired to enlarge the committee by adding another member rarely qualified by his sympathy with both sides, an ideal choice, in my opinion, would be Mr. Edwin Muir.

Or should we put these matters to a popular vote? Another committee—the Committee for Verse and Prose Recitation—has decided to appeal, not merely to the public, but to the public-house, the latter being "a ready-made and permanent centre of recreation and communal life", and has been arranging readings and recitations of "good verse" in these places of popular entertainment. The idea of the "reformed public-house" came in some time ago, and always seemed to me an inspired device for increasing the habit of moderate drinking by making drinking respectable. The Licensed Victuallers tumbled to the idea with alacrity—successfully, if I may judge by the processions of motor-cars which make their way to the reformed public-house in the next street to that in which I write. Well, here is more reformation. I like to think of Mr. W. B. Yeats contributing to the reform of the "Red Lion" by chanting his poems to the casual audience that gathers there, or Mr. Spender impressing his views on imaginative drinkers at the "Bull and Bush". It ought to be said that some of these places of refreshment have already made a speciality of cabaret shows and variety turns, which can be further diversified by poetry recitals. A week or two ago one of the youngest of the younger poets went down, according to programme, to a certain public-

house, armed with a sheaf of his own poems. Though sandwiched in between a dance turn and a comedian, he did not shrink from the task of reading the most serious of his poems to a respectful if somewhat astonished audience; and only once, during a fanciful allusion to ducks, was there any interruption—and that was a solitary “quack! quack!”

DECEMBER 1937

The organisers of the National Book Fair did well in getting Mr. Winston Churchill to open their show at Dorland Hall, for Mr. Churchill happily combines all the qualifications for such a task. He is a statesman, and to-day there are few men conspicuous in politics who link up public life with the fine art of literature. Secondly, as Mr. Fisher wrote in our last number, he is an author of “romantic temperament”, possessed of a “powerful grip of essential fact, wide range of experience, imagination, and vocabulary”. And thirdly, as Lord Kemsley reminded his audience, he is a best-seller.

But I am not sure that Lord Kemsley is right in saying that we must go back to Disraeli to find a true comparison with Mr. Churchill (as statesman-best-seller). Lord Morley’s *Life of Gladstone* sold 30,000 copies in its first year and 100,000 more in the ten years that followed. Bryce’s *Holy Roman Empire* is a classic whose sale, spread over many years, was enormous, and his *American Commonwealth* enjoyed a large continuous sale in the United States. And what about Mr. Lloyd George? Lord Kemsley reminds me of the youthful Hamilton who forgot the family friend, Aubrey de Vere—“Thinking of Latin, and thinking of trouble, and thinking of God, I have forgotten Aubrey de Vere”. Lord Kemsley, absorbed in his reflections, has forgotten Mr. Lloyd George, who from 1923 onwards has rivalled Mr. Wells as a world best-seller.

Mr. Churchill made one remark which will lead many readers of *The London Mercury* to hope that he may be restored to the office of Chancellor of the Exchequer. He

said that a wise Chancellor would allow authors to write off every year against income-tax a substantial sum for depreciation of mental machinery through wear and tear. This proposal was first made, I believe—not playfully, but in all seriousness—by Mr. Edmund Dulac, who, of course, would have extended the benefit to artists. Mr. Dulac argued, I think, that there are only a few years in the life of the average successful author or artist in which he reaps adequate financial rewards; that these are really the product, not of those few years, but of his whole life effort, and that the larger proportion ought to be regarded as capital. I am sure he will be gratified to know that he has converted Mr. Churchill, and will look forward to the speedy conversion of Sir John Simon.

Nor did Mr. Churchill shrink from stirring the darker waters of the publishing trade, deploing the “deliberate publication of books of a uniform political tendency to an organised mass of readers”. He did not mention by name the Book Clubs of the Left or Right, or the earnest activities of Mr. Gollancz in a field of propagandist literature which he has made his own. Mr. Gollancz needs no defending. He is singularly well qualified to defend himself. But it is proper to recognise that he has a case as long as he remains so perfectly frank about what he is doing. It would be a severe shock to most of us if long-established firms like Murray and Macmillan began to identify themselves with some particular brand of political thought, and it would be a bad thing for literature if most of the publishers were politically labelled, and authors came to be divided into sheep and goats. But there is nothing essentially more sinful in the establishment of a propagandist publishing house than there is in the publication of a party newspaper—so long as there is no concealment and we know where we are. Such a firm would only become a public danger to free writing and free publishing if it were in a position to get a stranglehold over the publishing world—that is to say, really to introduce that “totalitarianism in the field of literature” which Mr. Churchill fears.

1938

JANUARY

If the New Year is a time for good resolutions, I suggest that we should resolve to get rid of the tyranny of certain words. One of these words is *Victorian*, as used by the very young to indicate the imbecility of having been born more than thirty-seven years ago. Another is the word *traditional*, a term which has been carefully used by Mr. T. S. Eliot, but after him has been constantly employed to mean what is *not original*, and so *slavishly conventional*.

But above all let us enter a *caveat* against the work *ideology*, a hard-worked term whose abuse is a serious contributing factor making for war. When we speak of the rival ideologies, with reference to Fascism and Communism, we give a kind of added splendour to the struggle, suggesting that it is no ordinary struggle, but a war for exalted ideas, for grand spiritual causes. Since thousands will rush into battle for an idea who would not lift a finger for a despot or a *caucus*, despots and *caucuses* are naturally pleased to have their ambitions associated with the glory of ideas.

But when we examine these too much contrasted ideologies we find that the ideas within them, so far from being opposites, are more often identical. Common to both are despotism; economic and political totalitarianism; the suppression of free thought and free speech. Even the economic systems towards which both tend are less opposed to each other than both are to the systems prevailing in Britain or America. There was a real ideology behind the French Revolution. "Man was born free, but everywhere he is in chains" Rousseau stood not merely for *an idea*

—that of liberty—but for *all* ideas, for the right of man to have and express as many ideas as he likes, as contrasted with the *fixed idea* of authority and convention. There was a real ideology in the spiritual warfare of the Romanticists and the French Revolutionaries, and their struggle changed the heart and mind of civilised man. But there are no comparable new ideas in the so-called ideologies of to-day.

If it is said that the real conflict of our time is not between Communism and Fascism, but between democracy and despotism, then, surely, the real rivalry is between a system based on ideas and a system deprived of them. On the one side, ideas of all kinds; on the other, at the most an *idée fixe* (which tends to be the absence of any live idea). The former implies the maintenance and extension of free thought in every direction; the latter, the suppression of thought, and reversion to the divine right of authority. The real ideological conflict turns out to be one between ideas and resistance to ideas, and must therefore be waged even within our own imperfect democracy. It is up to us if we are on the democratic side to begin by insisting that ideas—ideas based upon disinterested thought—get the attention they deserve, not only abroad, but here in our midst.

In regard to Spain, for example, does there exist any clear, informed idea for the solution of its problems, apart from a Fascist victory achieved through Franco or a Communist victory achieved through the Republic? Of course there does. Read Ortega y Gasset. Read José Castillejo. Read particularly the advice which the latter has recently been giving, urging us to think of Spain, not as primarily divided between revolutionaries and anti-revolutionaries, still less Communists and Fascists, but as the victim of unhappy experiments in centralised and decentralised government, and naturally divided by certain inherited characteristics. Stop the futility of bloodshed, he suggests, and let each side, unconquered, set up its own administration in the territory it now holds.

This is not the place to discuss the reasons for supposing

that a peace of this kind, without conquest, would lead to an ultimate federation of States in the Spanish Peninsula. Enough now to point out that here is an idea put forward by an experienced Spaniard for settling the Spanish question without loss of prestige to any foreign Power. One would like to know that Mr. Anthony Eden was at least in touch with such men as Señor Castillejo and Señor Ortega y Gassett.

FEBRUARY 1938

At the moment of writing I have before me some poems by my friend Mr. Yone Noguchi, the Japanese poet who writes most of his work in English. It must be distressing to him and many others of his countrymen—as it is to us—to watch the estrangement between Great Britain and Japan arising from the war in China. Here as elsewhere in the world political and military disturbances are cutting across those friendly personal contacts which modern travel and the easy exchange of ideas have made possible. Among people interested in ideas difference of nationality is not an insuperable obstacle; on the contrary, disclosing new facets of mind and feeling, it challenges intellectual curiosity, and raises points of comparison and contrast worth exploring. There is always more in common between people of different countries interested in the same order of ideas than between people of the same country not thus united.

Understandings which rest on a basis of this kind will not easily be broken because Governments do this or that, nor even when mass national feeling is roused in moments of political or military upheaval. But it would be idle to deny that for all but the few a general stampede of nationalism is a set-back to understanding, and even the few have to be very steadfast of soul. In the fog of propaganda it is not easy to see clearly, and the memory may be dimmed. In the case of Italy and Britain the long tradition of friendship has been obscured. Though we do not suppose that Italian cities, pictures, sea and skies have turned Fascist,

we have to keep on reminding ourselves that the Italian people should not be identified with all that is done in their name. In the case of Japan the majority of Britons, in their resentment of aggression in China, may direct some of this feeling against the Japanese nation; and on their side the Japanese, being actually at war, must find it still more difficult to see things with detachment. Occasions like this are an exacting test of intelligence.

For most of us in Great Britain contacts with persons or things Japanese are comparatively few. At one time Gilbert and Sullivan's *Mikado* broadly expressed the popular idea of Japan; it came under the censor's ban as likely to be offensive to our new allies. In my own case, my first impression of Japan was derived from the stories of a relative who had lived there; after that, there was a book on the ethical doctrines and practice of *Bushido*, and then the books of Lafcadio Hearn who, half-British, half-American by origin, and by intellectual adoption Japanese, has probably done more than any other writer to interpret the mind of Japan to English-speaking people. Of course one has met, and in a few cases come to know, Japanese visitors to England; and of course there have been translations of Japanese books, and Japanese works of art, especially colour-prints. And one is reminded that on the other side, in Japan, they have had Mr. Edmund Blunden, Mr. Robert Nichols, and other English men of letters as Professors of Literature in Tokyo, and that the English language holds a high place in the studies of all the Universities and Colleges of Japan.

Against all this is set a number of different impressions: of the terrific efficiency of the Japanese in modern war, as first revealed in the Russo-Japanese War; their political and economic opportunism: and above all the present war, now uppermost in our minds. *The London Mercury* has many readers in Japan, who cannot be expected to see these matters exactly as we do. I can only remind them of the interests which they and the British readers of this journal have in common. In these days there is no good

excuse for thinking in terms of "East is East and West is West". Everywhere there are people who are steeped in race and drugged by habit, and there are people who are not.

MARCH 1938

A correspondent has just written to me asking how it is that articles not immediately concerned with literature or the arts sometimes find a place in *The London Mercury*. "I have liked these articles", he writes, "and make no complaints, but I had thought your magazine was only a literary magazine".

Only a literary magazine! Well—literature is not so very small a subject—and I admit that *The London Mercury* does claim to be primarily devoted to literature and the arts. But this does not mean that it is only concerned with books, plays, pictures and the like. We interpret our function a good deal more widely than that, and even claim that the whole of life is our province in so far as it is approached in a certain way—the way, shall I say, in which an imaginative person approaches it when he is seeking to understand it or to make it intelligible. Nor do we think of the creative writer as one concerned with airy artistic inventions. He is not less concerned with actualities than the scientist or the politician. We value him in proportion as he can brush aside the irrelevancies and get to the core. It is the aim of writers in *The London Mercury* to help in creating the atmosphere where such clear-sightedness can prevail.

It follows, does it not, that we must sometimes broach questions which are the ordinary subject-matter of politicians or sociologists, and especially in these days, when there are so many impediments to the free play of the spirit. The fact that there are at this moment two great wars and one lesser war in progress, that powerful countries provide us with political sensations every day, that recurring crises in foreign politics engage a great part of the attention of the whole thinking community, that defence against threats

of war necessitates expenditure such that no Government will think of spending more money than it is compelled to on the amenities of life—these facts, and the like, are of profound concern to those whose interests are in the humanities—even, if you like, in *literae humaniores*. Indeed, thinking people not ordinarily concerned with the routine of politics will not leave these matters to politicians, who are so often too busy to look far ahead. You can see that in the correspondence columns of *The Times*, where persons of widely varying interests unburden their minds upon public questions.

Among such questions none, I think, for some time has been receiving more attention than the question of Spain. (Perhaps I should say, next to the “pronunciation of Latin”, a topic which has recently withdrawn writers, in escapist spirit, to the lighter verities.) Spain has naturally come first, not only because that country has always had its peculiar allure ever since Don Quixote peopled the imagination of the world or because it has been turned into a sort of grim jousting ground for the conflicting ideas of our time, but because it is the principal cause of dissension in Europe and the main obstacle to peace. So long as this ugly struggle in Spain continues there can be no cessation of violent national rivalries, of war talk, of crises which fill the newspapers and tend to monopolise talk, no normal civilised life, no assured pleasure in travel, no easy give-and-take between Germans, Italians and Britons, no concentration on those domestic crises which need attention, no consideration in Ministerial circles for the amenities of life, and no money to spare for them. The prolongation of the war in Spain is the cause of the neglect of innumerable activities for the lack of which our civilised life and that of other countries is being impoverished. To promote an honourable ending to this war has been, or should have been, absolutely the first issue not only for politicians but for every person who desires to restore the balance of social life.

I alluded last January to a book by Ortega y Gasset,

and to the proposals of José Castillejo for a compromise settlement in Spain, under which each side would control the area it now occupies. A recent letter to *The Times*, signed by several writers, called attention to the endeavours of a group of non-partisan Spaniards to promote civil and religious peace among the Spanish people, and mentioned particularly Professors Castillejo and Madariaga. The letter urged that the two lines of effort which are now being pursued by the Government to secure foreign withdrawal from Spain and to stop aerial bombardment of civilians, should be followed by a third—an effort to promote an armistice and, with it, peace.

The above words were written, and in type, before Hitler struck his blow at Austria, and before Mr. Anthony Eden resigned. But I do not think they have ceased to be relevant. Italy would not have been so lightly flouted by Germany were it not for her commitments in Spain. There would have been no split in the British Cabinet if the Spanish question had been out of the way. An honourable settlement within Spain—without conquest—is still a prime *desideratum*.

In the meantime, most of the agencies which control publicity contribute to the unease which arises from the world situation. It is an historic fact that newspapers at all times have enjoyed exceptional prosperity in times of war—the German wars in the seventeenth century, the Napoleonic wars, the Crimean War, the Boer War and the Great War all gave fresh impetus to the sales of newspapers. Well, we cannot expect newspapers to forgo the advantage which accrues from the recording of important war news or even the retailing of horrors.

But it is not only the newspapers. The B.B.C. has, doubtless not by intention but through insufficient study of the psychological effects produced by short, condensed reports, contributed its full quota of terror-sensationalism. Night after night the public announcer, having disposed of one or two unfortunates who lie dangerously ill in hospital and gale warnings and other weather news, goes on in soft

accents to break the news of bombardments in Spain, massacres in China, outbreaks in Abyssinia, Nazi activities in Germany, Signor Gayda's latest taunts at Britain, the plight of the Basque children in England, the earthquake in Siberia, the air-raid precautions and other dour matters scarcely alleviated by such items of domestic interest as the typhoid epidemic at Croydon or the destruction of cattle in foot-and-mouth disease areas. Night after night the average citizen turns on the wireless and listens to the restrained, short sentences of the announcer, so passionless, so polished in their tones as to seem to conceal more than they say, recording in monotonous succession another score of ghastly failures in civilisation. Every night, between the string quartettes and the dance music, that daily dose of black doom to make listeners think of gas-proof dugouts and a quick latter end.

I am not in the least in favour of suppressing bad news or withholding necessary tales of horror, but I cannot believe that the directors of "weather and news" have sufficiently considered their medium from the listeners' point of view. When exactly the same news is reported in the Press—even in the more sensational Press—it occurs merely as a part of a great mass of widely diversified news and does not create the same impression of universal, unqualified disaster. The daily papers do present considerable slices out of life, but the B.B.C. has only time for the outstanding events, and these are preponderantly concerned with war and destruction. Thus the evidence is weighted; the gruesome, by its isolation, is exaggerated; the nation is gradually being led to think more of war and sudden death than anything else, with the possible exception of football.

I speak of the B.B.C. because it is ours, and also because it is broadcasting at its (present) best. But consider the psychological consequences for the human race, when all the news-broadcasters are presenting this daily dose of terror-sensation in all countries. What effect is this having upon public morale?

APRIL 1938

I have just been reading Professor Gilbert Murray's little book, *Liberality and Civilisation*. I came to it after studying an article on *The War of the Future—Totalitarian War*, by the distinguished French military expert, Colonel J. Cuny. It appears in this issue of *The London Mercury*.

These two works might well be read side by side. They are, in a certain sense, complementary to each other. Colonel Cuny is discussing war and preparation for war and shows these as the necessary consequence of a certain process in the organised life of society through which we are now passing. Professor Murray is discussing peace and preparation for peace and discovers in this same organised society a movement capable, if it prevails, of leading to universal peace as surely as the other, if it prevails, leads to universal war. Colonel Cuny is not opposed to Professor Murray or Professor Murray to Colonel Cuny. The Frenchman is showing what must happen if the individual man or woman becomes a mere cog in the machine of the modern State—as he or she tends more and more to become. The other considers what may happen if human beings, still free, co-operate to save freedom.

Colonel Cuny has one disturbing advantage in the matter of winning our attention. He is speaking about what is *actual* and all too conspicuous to-day. Does it follow from his argument that if we understand modern war rightly we are *already at war*—though it has not come to the killing point? We have all been made familiar with the expressions, tariff wars, trade wars, economic war in general—to which must be added propaganda wars by radio and Press, songs of hate, drilling and arming on a war scale, and tax-paying on a war scale. We are already experiencing many of the actual disadvantages of real war as remembered by those who were adults in 1918—war taxation, war loans, the diversion of labour into munitions making, voluntary war activities (A.R.P., etc.) and, above all, the ceaseless

pre-occupation with one theme to the impoverishment of thought and conversation. It is arguable that the present colossal preparation for war is so much a part of real war that in many cases the sequel of actual killing may prove unnecessary—an immense demonstration of force where there was no adequate force to meet it has more than once been followed by instant submission, as when the Germans marched into the Rhineland, and Schuschnigg, measuring his poor little forces against Hitler's, yielded to the inevitable and gave up Austria to avoid bloodshed. In like manner Italy, realising that the fear of war has neutralised Britain, is engaged on the warlike measures of occupying, one by one, the strategic points in the Mediterranean. The only difference (doubtless a big difference) between this "preparation for war" and the thing itself is that all the objects of the aggressor are obtained with the minimum of bloodshed.

The principal hope of escape from this state of affairs is that the majority of people everywhere dislike it. Regimentation is one way of solving the problem of the complexity of modern life, but there is another way, which is called "planning" and implies co-operation and joint action in the common interest. Broadly speaking, that has been the British way during the last century, and still is; and our supreme task is to find a means of keeping to it without leaving ourselves defenceless against those who ruthlessly pursue the other method and ridicule ours. The British way, as we believe, must be pursued if we are to attain what Professor Murray calls "true civilisation," which he thus defines:

It sets men free; free from the pressure of daily fear inasmuch as it provides security; free from the pressure of daily hunger and thirst as it provides a reserve of wealth; free to do the things he really wants to do instead of merely what he must do in order to keep alive, free to make poetry and music, to pursue art and science, to think and speak and create.

Freedom in these senses is to be attained, according to Professor Murray, only by a certain activity of mind, which

he calls "Liberality"—not "Liberalism" simply (the creed of a political party to which, as it happens, Professor Murray belongs) but something, we may hope, far less likely to be outmoded, and revealed often in persons who call themselves Conservatives or Socialists, or are not labelled at all. Freedom is the gist of the thing—but not merely freedom from physical constraint, or freedom from oppressive poverty, or even from fear, but also, and especially, freedom from set habits of mind, from prejudice, from the tyranny of catch-words and of ideas which we merely inherited and never explored, or which we embraced in adolescence and have never probed again—freedom from intellectual rust and from atrophy of the perceptions. It implies an endless capacity to readjust ideas to changing circumstances, quickness of understanding and sympathy.

Professor Murray's "Liberality" requires, in thought, an eager pursuit of truth, and in action an eager pursuit of justice; its opposites are blind partisanship or inertia and brute coercion. The difficulty is that we live in a world many of whose leaders have adopted the creed of progress by way of violence. Professor Murray says that "the nations that for the sake of peace are ready to live according to law and accord justice to others are a vast majority". If that were the whole of the truth the solution would be easy. It would be enough for the "just" nations to arm themselves for defence against aggressors, to ignore the "brutes" and establish co-operatively their own internal polity in their own way. But it is not so simple as that, for there is no nation which has not within it large streaks both of the tyrant mind and the slave mind, opposing the liberal mind; and so you have compromises where there should be action and submission where there should be firmness. The "liberal" nations are always in danger of being betrayed by what is false within, not because they are liberal but because they are not liberal enough.

I must repeat: This has no reference whatever to that divided, leaderless and disappointing political body, the Liberal Party.

The organisation which bears the name "For Intellectual Liberty" exists to bring together "the greatest possible number of intellectual and professional workers who are concerned with the defence of peace, liberty and culture". Its latest pronouncement was an appeal to its supporters in all parties to "rally the forces of democracy in this country, in order to secure a Government which can save peace and democratic liberty". I do not propose to discuss this particular manifesto, which is severely critical of the Government and blames it for failing to stand up effectively for democracy on the one hand and British Imperial interests on the other. What I am at the moment concerned to point out is that the main body of intellectual opinion in this country stands severely aloof from the Government. Not only is it the case that the Cabinet is singularly devoid of students and men of letters—there are probably fewer Ministers of this class than at any previous time in the last century—but also there are few indications even of contacts between Ministers and men of intellectual attainment. Even the material available is not used to reinforce the thinking department of a Government called National—Mr. Winston Churchill, for example, Lord Eustace Percy, Lord Lothian, Mr. Harold Macmillan . . .

There is considerable danger that politics in this country will fall into the condition in which it has long been in America, where men of a certain character do not care to go in for the political game. Labour, dismally represented in Parliament, has at least one advantage, that it has behind it a body of intellectual doctrine which appeals to the mind and the imagination. Pure Conservatism is also capable of being supported by a system of attractive and consistent ideas, but there is little pure Conservatism to-day. A National Government, from the nature of the case, cannot have behind it a real political philosophy: its claim to represent and include all parties and all philosophies means

in effect the neutralising of the philosophies and the dilution of the parties. We cannot see any possible alternative Government, for there is at present no other set of politicians whom the country would probably dare to put in office; but we cannot fail to observe that the new system tends to squeeze out men of distinctive and strong convictions—say, like Mr. Eden.

For such a man the system leaves only two courses—either to retire from effective politics or to regard politics as a career, like the law, in which a man gets up his brief and merely argues the Government's case. The Government tends to become more and more like the Board of a business undertaking, whose members serve for life or until superannuated, and are recruited from younger men who have the requisite executive talent and docility. Moreover, the routine work is so exacting that even if a Minister had the inclination he has not the time for study and thought, and since the Government tends to perpetuate itself he never enjoys the leisure of being in opposition. Mr. Chamberlain and Sir John Simon, who have been in office for nearly seven years, may, conceivably, still be shouldering the burden of their duties seven years hence.

In the past statesmen of all parties have had behind them groups of thinkers who were profoundly influencing their opinions and actions. But if you look round among the leading economists, political philosophers, historians, social reformers and men of letters, and ask what contacts they have with the Government or the Government with them the answer in most cases is *none*. Wherever one goes in the circles of educated and thinking people one finds uneasiness at the lack of any clear sense of direction in statesmanship, any firm objective, or any awareness of principle binding together means and end.

This separation between the governing class and the intelligentsia (the former becoming increasingly bourgeois) would be serious at any time, but it is particularly serious to-day when the political affairs of the world are in a critical condition affecting the issues of peace or war,

liberty or servitude So much is this the case that there is no person whose attention is not constantly distracted by it, even when his proper first concern is with some art or science or other pursuit normally far removed from politics. Politics, national and international, is now seen to be an affair embracing the whole life and existence of man, including his culture, his right to think and speak, and even his religion. There is no limit to the degree in which we may not, any or all of us, be intimately affected by the decisions of politicians; all thinkers are constantly thinking in terms of politics; yet precisely at this time the direction of affairs is falling into the hands of a semi-professional political class divorced from the classes which are concerned with ideas, their case being defended by men speaking to a brief, though they are protected from grievous error in matters of routine owing to the existence of a competent and trustworthy Civil Service.

We see the unease caused by this poverty of idea (and idealism) in politics, now in the eruption into political controversy of young poets and dramatists, now in the formation of groups such as "For Intellectual Liberty". All of these movements are directed towards forming public opinion, but efforts are seldom canalised into political action. Take the case of F.I.L. It speaks of the need for a lead and a clear policy for Great Britain "to check the growth of international lawlessness and the degradation of international morality". But it is careful to add that F.I.L. "is not a party political organisation, nor is it a new movement entering politics on its own account". Like half a dozen other somewhat similar organisations, it is simply a group attempting to disseminate ideas. It does not appear to be realised that it is not enough to have the thinking people on your side if some of them are not prepared to enter the arena and take practical action. It is true, one or two individuals like Mr. A. P. Herbert and Mr. Harold Nicholson have actually entered Parliament, and the former was quickly able to take a dramatic and effective part in legislation. But one swallow does not make

a Spring. Will all these groups of intellectuals accomplish anything comparable with their ideals or adequate to the issues at stake unless they organise a large-scale assault on the political citadel?

JUNE 1938

Bring together a practical, imaginative engineer and a practical, imaginative architect, give them a metropolitan area of 1,800 square miles, with nearly ten million inhabitants, to play with, and a period of thirty years for the maturing of their plans, and what might they not be expected to make of Greater London? This is what an agile Minister of Transport, Mr. Hore-Belisha, thought of in a twinkling of an eye some three years ago—much to his credit—when he appointed Sir Charles Bressey to make a highways survey and Sir Edwin Lutyens to advise him. What a delightful task! Many of us would like to sit down forthwith with a map of Greater London before us and re-create it as it should be—with nothing whatever, apparently, to deter us; for at the present rate of demolition more than half of London is in any case doomed to come down during the next thirty years; and surely we might arrange it that it should go up again in a sensible, orderly way rather than in the present senseless, chaotic way!

No doubt Sir Charles Bressey could have produced something even more desirable than he had done if he had given his fancy a free vein and assumed that no Utopia is too Utopian to be accomplished in so long a time as thirty years. But he had to begin by studying about 250 schemes that have already been propounded for improving traffic facilities in the Metropolis, and the town planning schemes and other programmes prepared by more than 150 Local Authorities and Regional Committees, and he had to take into account the Registrar-General's forecasts of future population and the Ministry of Transport's estimates of increased motor-car traffic. With these and other daunting

facts before him he did well to consider not merely what is desirable but what is likely to be achieved in view of the inevitable red-tape of officials and the natural sluggishness of human nature. As a practical person, bearing all these considerations in mind, Sir Charles Bressey has prepared a plan which could be carried out step by step, from what exists to what does not exist, without too many abrupt breaks, without imposing terrific strains upon the official mind, but towards an end which would really make through traffic in London tolerable and admit of judicious reconstruction around the main arteries.

Now it was Sir Charles Bressey's job to think in terms of roads—roads only—and as one who was concerned only with roads he has thought on the largest possible scale, indeed he has occasionally gone beyond his restricted theme in dwelling upon the redevelopment of congested areas which would arise from the better planning of roads or the amenities which would follow severe prevention of ribbon development. His object is to prevent, by the provision of the right roads, congestion of traffic in the centre of London and to provide free access from the centre to the circumference, whence main arteries radiate outwards to all parts of England, and easy ways round the crowded focal points.

Thus the new arterial roads which enter the Metropolis at opposite points of the compass, such as the Western Avenue and the Eastern Avenue, would be linked up by street improvements involving the use of viaducts and tunnels as well as the opening up of existing roads. The linking up of north and south will require the construction of tunnels in Battersea and under Kensington Gardens and a long viaduct in Southwark and Walworth. The Embankment would be extended to the Tower eastwards and to Putney westwards. Oxford Circus and Piccadilly Circus would be enlarged for the provision of adequate roundabouts with adequate approaches. And so on, from east to west, north to south—everything according to a big, comprehensively devised though not grandiose plan,

which can be adopted early, and carried out, as occasion offers, during the period of the next thirty years, reaching completion when some persons already adult will still be alive—assuming adequate air-raid precautions and a sound foreign policy.

My main objection to the scheme lies not in the scheme itself but in the terms of reference. Sir Charles Bressey was instructed to consider “improved communications by road”, and under this limitation he had no choice but to neglect one fundamental fact about London—that it is built on the banks of the River Thames and that the Thames has been its main natural highway through the ages until about a century ago. As a highway to-day it is still available, but it is almost wasted; its vast potentialities are deplorably neglected. And this report, though it looks forward thirty years, has nothing to say about it. It has much to say about transport over or under the river but nothing about transport *on* the river. Moreover, if the Thames had figured more conspicuously in Sir Charles’s vision of London he would surely have had to be concerned not only about the prolongation of the northern embankment—as he has been—but equally about the provision of a southern embankment, to which Sir Edwin Lutyens would have added appropriate buildings; and with this consideration in mind, and the provision of new roads approaching the Thames from the south, Sir Charles Bressey might have reversed his decision in condemning the scheme for a Charing Cross Bridge.

None the less, Sir Charles Bressey’s comprehensive proposals command admiration. They have the merit of thinking in terms of Greater London as a whole. It is all too rarely that we look far ahead, or are ready to begin to take action now with a view to future needs. Better far that the scheme should be carried out even with its imperfections than that no scheme should be adopted. The Minister of Transport should be entreated not to let this report be pigeon-holed, but to set the machinery going for its detailed consideration and bold subsequent action.

JULY 1938

The whole history of British Broadcasting up to now has been associated with the name of Sir John Reith. He was general manager of the British Broadcasting Company from 1922 till 1927, and he has been Director-General of the Corporation from its inception in 1927 till to-day. His tall form, his severe obstinate face, have been in our minds' eye whenever we have talked of Savoy Hill or Broadcasting House and whenever we have praised, blamed or tolerated the multifarious activities of the B.B.C. We are aware of the existence of Governors, but we have never thought of them as having much to do with the ordering of programmes, the appointment of staff, or the control of the noises which we are constrained to hear in every part of the country. Sir John Reith has been not the figurehead merely but the power there, with trembling myrmidons around him, issuing his decrees, apparently indifferent to any criticism except those criticisms from the general public which it was the duty of his staff to collate. He has been called a dictator, a superman, and various other names which have been applied in admiration or distrust; and now, on his transference to another sphere of rule, the Press in general agreement has pointed out that it was a very good thing that such a dictator should have built up the B.B.C. in its youth but has broadly hinted that perhaps the time has come when he should go.

In attempting to assess the value of his work it is well to consider not only what the B.B.C. is but what it might have been. Sir John Reith had to choose between certain lines of policy. No particular credit is due to him for the fact that it has not been commercialised, as in France or in America; the constitution settled that; it was to be a public Corporation, subject to a charter, enjoying freedom from Government interference, though ultimately responsible to the State, which collects its fees from the public. But at the outset it had to take one supremely important decision. As

a State institution, should it regard itself as an educator of the public, with the avowed object of raising its taste, giving it not what it wants but what it ought to have? In other words, should the position of the B.B.C. be like that of the British Museum and the National Gallery, institutions which preserve for the public only the very best of their kind in the interests of knowledge and good taste? This was an attitude which it certainly might have adopted. The B.B.C. might have become the University of the air, teaching, training, educating the minds of the public through its ears. But if this had been its attitude there would not have been eight million licences paid for and a radio set in every other house.

Alternatively it might have been decided that since the public pays for its licences and for its radio sets no other consideration should be acted upon but that of studying and satisfying the taste of the multitude. In that case the B.B.C. would have ranked itself with the popular national Press and with the films as one of the forces which pander to the populace and help to perpetuate the existing low standards of judgment and æsthetic enjoyment.

Sir John Reith and his advisers—rightly, most of us must think—decided to compromise. He would give something of everything—a little “culture”, a good deal of popular entertainment (of a kind that few puritans could regard as unwholesome) and a carefully chosen survey of the day’s news. We have all been critical—rightly so; there has been much to criticise. It would be idle to suggest that the results have been all that we think they might have been. But there is this outstanding fact to be noted about the B.B.C.—a fact which distinguishes it from any other educative, recreative or cultural institution in the world. It has avoided being highbrow, tutorial, particularist, and has been so popular in its appeal as to capture the attention of the whole nation; and at the same time it has avoided those barbarities which in the popular Press and the cinema tend to lower the general

mentality of the nation. I must qualify this by saying that there is a section of the popular Press which is gallantly resisting this tendency. Yet, in the main, surely the social historian will have to record that in the year 1938 there were three great agencies using a highly organised mechanism on a national scale which were profoundly modifying the thought and character of the nation—namely, the popular Press, the cinema, and the B.B.C.—and that of these, taking each collectively, the B.B.C. alone was an influence tending to raise the nation higher in the scale of civilisation.

If that proposition is accepted Sir John Reith and those who have worked with him have much to congratulate themselves upon in looking back on the work of the last eleven years.

In speaking of these three influences will it be supposed that I have forgotten the responsible Press, and especially the printed book and the literary reviews? No, indeed; I have not forgotten them. If I have not mentioned them it is because literature of this kind falls into a different category. It is not a product of mass production controlled in a central factory and distributed in bulk to meet the ascertained demand of the proletariat. Literature is always the expression of individual minds, each endeavouring to make contact with other individual minds; and publishers and editors should be thought of primarily as agents, sympathetic agents, one must suppose, for smoothing the passage of those unique things—the ideas and impressions of authors—to others willing to receive and share them.

I have just been reading M. Georges Duhamel's book *In Defence of Letters*. M. Duhamel speaks of "our system of culture" as founded on printing. "The book is one of the springs of creative individualism, but individualism which, in these uncertain times, remains the guardian angel of human society". But he notes with anxiety the distraction of other interests, other amusements—"civilised activities seem to be operating temporarily so as to suspend the very progress of civilisation itself and divert it into other channels"

—and he points to the competing interests of the film, the radio, the picture paper and games, which seem to show that “the essential diet of the elect, the master minds, are going to play an ever-diminishing role in the enlightenment and entertainment of the public”. Civilisation has been producing a variety of contrivances which “spare the mass of people that intellectual effort which is the only measure of true culture”. “I tell my contemporaries that printing is a sacred art, and I warn them that it is in serious danger”.

Naturally I turned with special interest to read what M. Duhamel might have to say about literary reviews. It is worth while to quote his words at some length. He writes:

It remains to define the function of the review. The review comes half-way between the book and the newspaper, and, as its name suggests, its duty is to review—to pass under judgment—a short period of world history.

Such a publication shares the life of books. It does not die at once and will find a place on the shelves of our library, where it can be consulted at our pleasure. It answers our questions and reminds us what was going on, and how, in such and such a year or season.

The reviews are indispensable to the intellectual equilibrium of the countries that to-day guard our civilisation. Gone are the days when a group of writers founded a new literary review every six months. The young poets sometimes try still, in a small way, at great cost to themselves—paper is dear, and so is print, and public interest is distracted in all sorts of other ways. To keep a review alive needs not only money and hard work but faith and love and unselfish devotion.

Some observers come to the conclusion that the world is changing and that there is nothing for it but for the reviews to fade out. I believe that this would be a great misfortune. The reviews represent a form of intellectual activity which is more than desirable in the present disorder. Continuity of thought, creative meditation, active study can only be preserved with the help of the literary reviews that survive. Books are so clumsy and slow; newspapers are too short and too slick. There must be some method of examining and criticising men and affairs, and for this purpose we need the review, which is the natural vehicle of watchful, tenacious thinking.

J U L Y 1938

The disappearance of even one review, just now, when intelligence is being restricted in its function, would be a misfortune. It is not a question of one school of thought or another, there is only one cause now, the cause of freedom of thought which is guarding its rights against attack from every side.

A U G U S T 1938

The calendar year begins in January. The financial year, as we know to our cost, begins in April. But the year of all normal activities—political, legal, educational, literary, theatrical, social—begins in the autumn and ends in the summer. Edward Thomas used to say that it was in October, rather than in April, that the earth smelt most freshly and the air was most buoyant. For myself I like to think of June and July as the climax, after which there comes an interval which is neither this year nor next, when we put aside the play-acting of last year, and only distantly and through the pleasant haze of August contemplate the play-acting of next year. In August Parliament rests and the politicians are scattered, lawyers are on vacation, Oxford and Cambridge are given over to tourists, the heads of businesses are away, and even that majority which remains at work has to breathe an atmosphere redolent of holiday. August is a neutral period, filled with topics which are called “silly season” topics simply because they have nothing to do with our normal activities. When, after August, we wake up again to normality, we shall come upon a new set of topics; the plot of the main story will have taken a new turn.

There are good reasons for hoping that it will be so; for this cessation from normality in August is largely psychological, and much of what has been most disastrous during this last year has been due to psychological causes. In this country three words, or rather three letters, have been responsible for not a little of the mischief—the letters A.R.P. I would not have it supposed for a moment that I make light of the praiseworthy activities of those

who are undertaking anti-air-raid work. It is necessary that they should be doing what they are doing. They are engaged in an essential service. Nor—this is all part of the same question—have I a word to say against the intensification of the military defence programme, which is unavoidable if Britain's peace policy is to be successfully promoted in the world. No doubt, in view of the way things work in our inchoate democracy, it was necessary to create an atmosphere in which much of the storm and stress, resembling actual war, should stir the minds and emotions of the people, so that they would be nerved for the effort they were called upon to make. And so during the last year and especially the last six months we have been talking war—not only of the actual wars in Spain and China, but war here. We have been listening to aeroplanes as potential bombers, watching the searchlights, considering bomb-proof shelters, gas-masks and all the paraphernalia of anti-air-raid precautions, and discussing at dinner, at breakfast and at sherry parties the once exciting topic that has now become dreary, disheartening and monotonous—the topic of war.

An evil day can be borne. Even real war, as we know, can be endured. It has its heroics amid the squalor. But an evil day, which is constantly put off but not disposed of, has a slow, tedious, sapping influence. No wonder the young become desperately impatient at the constant withholding of normal activities which they feel they have been deprived of. A sort of lassitude has crept over public life and has penetrated to business life. If the end of the world is coming, why bother? Curiously enough this apprehension has not made people spend recklessly, or even sell all that they have and give to the poor. It has made them hoard. It has produced weariness and timidity. And, as business men who control the big popular papers are belatedly beginning to realise, it is bad for trade. House-agents say that there has been an unprecedented slump in the sale of houses in London (though perhaps that does not apply to houses which have bomb-proof shelters). In the

July sales the great stores had none of the usual crowds of eager buyers. Is it significant that in four big shops in which, I am told, a lady recently tried to buy a pair of white shoes for holiday wear there were none to be had? There was no demand for them, it appeared. Could weariness go further? Not even white shoes for a summer day. So factories are slowing down, and the figures of unemployment have gone up.

But that year has ended. August, the neutral period, has come. Dictators, too, tend at this time of year to go on vacation, and even if they should from time to time break into strident utterance their voices sound thin, remote, unreal when heard under the absorbing influence of open air and sea, the governments which might answer them back are scarcely functioning; the world has other things to think of than shouts of menace or incitements to terror, and is ready enough to believe that those alarms and excursions, now only dim echoes, were never really more than fantastic exhalations of governments and all their paraphernalia. Perhaps the August interval brings us nearer to, not farther from, realities. And afterwards, when we come back to the racket, and step again into the stream, it will have become a different stream—and, that being so, perhaps a pleasanter one. Anyway, that is what the newspaper magnates are now magnanimous enough to hope.

If Henry James were alive to-day he might possibly feel that 1938 is further removed from 1910 than 1910 from 1810.

When his hero Ralph Pendrel arrived at his newly inherited house in Berkeley Square (it is called Mansfield Square in the novel, but Sir John Squire and Mr. Balderston, when they made a play out of the *Sense of the Past*, frankly called it Berkeley Square) he paid off the "growler" and left his companion, the American Ambassador, with top

hat, gloves and stick, standing on the pavement, watching him as he knocked at the door and disappeared through it into the beginning of the last century. That was in 1910.

The region was selected by Henry James because it peculiarly suited his purpose. It was in the very heart of his rich and fashionable West End. The house in it had the dignity and the aroma of its two hundred years of existence. It was characteristic of James to make his hero note (in 1910) that "the value of the property was so easily ascertained to be high"—though for him "it was none the less poetry" that it was so. When he entered the house for the first time he pronounced the whole scene "inimitably 'quiet,'" in respect, no doubt, both of the taste displayed and the absence of noise. Berkeley Square was like that in 1910—immensely valuable, but none the less free from ostentation, restrained, decorous, quiet.

I have walked through it several times during the last year. No Ralph Pendrel, projecting himself, this time, into the future—no ghost of an American Ambassador—no hansom or growlers—but the value of the property was still "easily ascertained to be high". But only the site value. Of little account were the old austere planned mansions with their once elegant interiors; a whole row of them had been knocked down by the housebreakers, and in their place was a yawning gulf surrounded by hoardings from which dust emerged and the noise of pneumatic drills—and soon cranes and iron girders and the outline of a building of strange and monstrous proportions.

This is the building which is to be the new headquarters of the Air Ministry. If Ralph Pendrel, who was thirty years old, I think, in 1910, is still alive to-day—and why not?—he will have had singular opportunities for revising his conceptions of the passage of time. His sensibility has been stirred by the old-worldliness of the house he inherited twenty-eight years ago. He made the great adventure of visiting it as it was in 1810. He has now the still more amazing experience of seeing it overshadowed by this vast steel building where hundreds of officials will be active in

hatching plans for filling the air with thousands of aeroplanes. This once quietest of all spots in Central London, already become one of the noisiest, has now a building whose main purpose will henceforward be associated in our minds with the utmost possible speed and maximum of noise—the noise of engines and the noise of explosives. Pendrel had a distressing sense of *malaise* in living out of his time in the less civilised atmosphere of 1810. He desired passionately to return to the culture of 1910. What is he thinking about its issue in 1938?

I suppose the most conspicuous of the external changes which have occurred during those twenty-eight years have been in respect of speed and noise—speed both in actual transit through space and in the rate of change, with its accompaniment of noise. The British Association, which discusses all things under the sun, has this year been considering the question of noise and its effect upon nerves and health. *The Times*, too, has been having an August correspondence on this provocative theme—and we have heard, now of the disastrous effects of sound irritants, now of the comparative harmlessness of noise when the human subject becomes habituated. The latter argument falls to the ground, since new noises are so quickly introduced that we have no opportunity to become habituated. No doubt there has always been a great deal of noise, perhaps about as much as there is now, where human beings are congregated together. The old horse traffic in the centre of any great city was probably quite as noisy as the motor traffic of to-day. The din in an oriental bazaar is nerve-assailing to those unaccustomed to it. And what more disturbing than the discordance of two hundred voices carrying on one hundred conversations in an overcrowded drawing-room?

The nuisance to-day lies not so much in the loudness of noise as in its ubiquity—there is no getting away from it and no effective redress against offenders. In theory the

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motor-cyclist without silencers on his engine can be prosecuted when he makes excessive noise—but action is rarely taken. Local authorities mending roads are among the worst offenders in the abuse of pneumatic drills—yet it is possible, at a somewhat higher cost, to reduce the noise of these instruments of torture. There is no escaping, at home or on the road, from the noise of competing radio sets. The main roads of Britain spread the din of traffic far and wide. The noises of motor-horns, which might be standardised and rendered comparatively harmless if not melodious, include rasping sounds which violently assault the ear. Speed-boats on sea and lake and motor-launches on the river disturb the peace of once quiet regions. And during the last year the multiplicity of aeroplanes, military and civilian, has made no remote place in this island safe as a retreat against invading noise. As a nation we have already become “motor-minded” and “radio-minded”, and we are becoming “air-minded”. These new habits come upon us quickly and inevitably, producing states of mind at variance with older and still valued states of mind. In the course of many decades they will become reconciled; use-and-wont will create courtesies of the road, the air and the ether. But in the long meantime can we afford to wait? Public opinion demands control and restriction—and rules will no doubt be made, as in the case of the Highway Code—but only if public opinion is very active will the rules be adequately enforced.

OCTOBER 1938

The month that is over has been crowded with excitements and forebodings which few of us will forget. There has been nothing comparable since the first days of August 1914. For once, for everyone—from a Cabinet Minister to a teashop waitress—the affairs of the nation have loomed larger than one's most personal concerns. It has been dinned into our consciousness that a war, if it comes, will be totalitarian; that all our activities, whatever they may be,

will be subordinate to it, and that it will strike at all indiscriminately, in their homes or at their work, and that civilians in the town may feel the brunt of it before any troops have been engaged. In those days of "crisis" a searchlight playing on the sky assumed a sinister significance; a passing aeroplane was a symbol of overwhelming forces which the man with a vote has no consciousness of having helped to create or of having power to control. It has been left to a few men in key positions to act for all the world, and so to arrange things as to avert or not avert war on the one hand, dishonourable peace on the other.

These terrific alarms and excursions are not conducive to the reading of books, but Professor J. B. S. Haldane's "A.R.P." was an obvious exception. Mr. Gollancz may be congratulated upon publishing such a book at such a moment. Professor Haldane writes with unquestionable authority and with practical imagination. He knows all there is to be known about the gases which are used in war. He has studied bombardments and precautions against them in Spain. He has gone exhaustively into the problem of air-raid protection in this country. His book is in the first place an indictment of the inadequate measures taken by the Government for the defence of the population, and secondly a constructive statement of what ought to be done. Not that anyone, I think, would accuse the Government of not talking enough about A.R.P. There has been talk enough to lower the morale of the nation, but not action enough, if we believe Professor Haldane, to fortify it.

In modern times there is the same necessity for a town to be protected against air attacks as there was for a medieval town to be fortified with a wall. Protection includes the instruction of all the inhabitants so that they know what to do when emergency arises—in reference, for example, to the evacuation of children and others, the distribution of gas masks, and the provision of shelter. The chief danger, according to Professor Haldane, is not from gas or incendiary bombs, but from explosion. Apart from the protection of

absolutely bomb-proof shelters, which cannot be constructed in a hurry, what is wanted is splinter-proof shelter. The number of casualties from direct hits in the open will be few. In the last war we used to regard direct hits as acts of God against which it was scarcely worth while to take precaution. Trenches in open places, as Professor Haldane indicates, afford sound protection against the principal danger, namely splinters, but it should be added that "tin hats" are also extremely valuable for avoiding wounds from falling debris. Many times in the last war my tin hat saved me from minor wounds. Cotton wool in the ears may protect the ear-drums—for my own part I found that opening the mouth at the right moment was equally effective, though perhaps this might not be the case when a heavy bomb falls on masonry or a metalled road. If dug-outs are used it is important to remember that they ought to have two exits.

But if we are thinking in terms of a modern equivalent for a walled town then we ought to accept Professor Haldane's drastic proposal, for the construction of a complete system of underground tunnels, fifty feet deep, available for the whole urban population. This might cost a quarter of what we are proposing to spend on rearmament. If such a colossal scheme as this should really be contemplated, surely we ought to see to it that these expensive works served a peace purpose as well as a war purpose. The Bressey report advocated the construction in certain places for traffic through London. The whole traffic problem of the metropolis might be solved by tunnels running from circumference to circumference. Underground car parks, too, are already needed. I dare say there are a good many other things that could be put underground, though I for one do not relish this idea of our turning ourselves into cave-men. I am inclined to think that if we put as much effort into propaganda to forbid the bombing of open towns as Professor Haldane would have us put into making ourselves bomb-proof, we might secure our ends in a happier way.

NOVEMBER 1938

"Now I feel that I must begin again and turn to the study of politics".

The words were those of a man far advanced in years, distinguished as an artist, poet and critic. He was telling me that when he was young politics in no way entered into his sphere of interests. Literature and the arts afforded all the reflective activity he needed, touching as they did what seemed to him vital in respect of society, friendship, love, religion, morality, apart from the endless delight in the technique of modes of expression. Governments came and went, making little difference to his world. The possibility of war or earth-shaking international events scarcely entered anybody's head. But that was long ago. The serenity, the untarnished delight in a number of things, have vanished. "Society, friendship, love, religion, morality"—upon these the hand of the politician has fallen heavily. The younger poets were studying politics. He too.

We are all in the affair together now. It is totalitarian. The issues upon which we have to make up our minds concern every aspect of our civilisation, and upon decisions already taken or immediately about to be taken depends all that we value.

Do you see the citizens standing about
Talking and staring in wonder and doubt?

said The Sage in a poem we printed last month. The lines, and those which followed, seemed timely enough when folk were wonderingly gazing at the digging of trenches in our peaceful cities, or trying on gas masks, or preparing to send their children to unknown destinations in the country.

Twenty years ago when we were in the front line in France it was a savage, malodorous region with no signs of civilian life except a few remnants of human dwellings—the Front presented a suitable scene for the nastiness of war

—though now and again one had the peculiar shock of seeing it burst its bounds, as when, for example, the church, market square and all the centre of the hitherto pleasant little town of Bethune were suddenly battered and broken, and chairs, beds, soft linen, flower vases, toys and the rest lurched through crumbled walls, and one marvelled, not at the familiar cruelty of war, but at its indecency.

That sort of outrageousness was what we were led to expect a few weeks ago when London and other big cities, we were told, might be regarded as the front line in the approaching war.

It was when Britain was in that mood of dark expectancy that Mr. Chamberlain, speaking in the House of Commons, made his dramatic announcement of Hitler's message and the invitation to Munich. It was a reprieve. It was "peace". Negotiations were to be resumed. In a few days he was back, declaring. "My action averted war". Berchtesgaden—Godesburg—Munich: all Mr. Chamberlain's doing—solus—he and Hitler. Result, peace. The Prime Minister was the nation's hero—indeed, two nations' hero, for through him Germany had attained all that she wanted, and not a shot fired (except, of course, among the Sudeten population).

There was no throwing up of hats, no bonfires, no exhilaration—merely a sense of relief after suspense and a general disposition to say what splendid resource and initiative the Prime Minister had shown. But the gloom, so far from passing, seemed, after a few days, to become intensified. For whilst we had saved our skins and averted resort to declared warfare, it soon became apparent that we had not yet saved much besides. The actual results of the Munich agreement, as it turned out, were no better than the demands made at Godesberg and rejected by Czechoslovakia. But the *method*, it was said, was different; we had substituted negotiation for armed invasion. What that amounted to was that under duress we had allowed the Germans to take ten days over their military occupation instead of one day, and we gave a guarantee which the

terms of the settlement made valueless. In the United States and other more or less disinterested countries Mr. Chamberlain's "success" at Munich was frankly described as "surrender"—a surrender to force—in such a way that the whole defensive system of the militarily powerful State of Czechoslovakia was put out of action and handed over to Germany, and with the result that all the south-eastern countries of Europe were bound to pass under Germany's economic hegemony, involving an immense accession to her power from a military as well as an economic point of view. A week before the Munich agreement Britain held all the trump cards in her hands, a week after, Germany was all-powerful and irresistible.

Now this is only one way of stating the question—the power-politics way—and it is not so simple as that. Indeed, it is so complex that sincere thinkers in Britain are divided into two camps which do not correspond with party divisions, and depend on two aspects of idealism which are not those of the recognised "ideologies". But first, there is one comment which must be made about the recent crisis. There is a tendency to concentrate attention on the period of the crisis alone—between Berchtesgaden and Munich—and to consider in isolation the tremendous personal efforts, undertaken with devotion and, as I am convinced, with single-minded sincerity by Mr. Chamberlain, to avert at all costs the catastrophe of a European war. It is possible that during that period, things having gone so far and Hitler being so deeply committed, nothing but surrender would have stopped war, and it is arguable in that case that surrender was right. But criticism cannot confine itself to the fortnight of the crisis. For the moment I put aside the long history of Britain's yielding—Manchuria, Abyssinia, Spain—and confine myself to the dispute over the Sudetenland. If on or before May 21st last, when Czechoslovakia mobilised and Germany drew back for a moment, Britain had unmistakably declared that she would stand by France, then most of us are convinced that Hitler, who dreaded a European war, would have been forced

to resort to honourable negotiations, and there would have been no ultimatums—no crisis.

Even to that charge Mr. Chamberlain may have a reasonable answer. Granted that Hitler was bluffing, was it right for him, Mr. Chamberlain, also to bluff—to take the risk, that is, which every bluffer takes? Would it have been right for him in May, or in September, to say that the consequences of German aggression would be war—would it have been right, that is, for him to say that under certain circumstances he would go to war when it was really his fixed intention *under no circumstances to go to war?* If von Ribbentrop was really right when he told Hitler that he could reckon with certainty that Britain would not go to war, would Mr. Chamberlain have been justified in pretending that von Ribbentrop was wrong?

It is not surprising that people should waver, as they do—even people strongly opposed to Britain's recent foreign policy—when you ask them point-blank whether a European war would have been better than a surrender to Hitler. And even when the strongest points of the case are admitted—when it is granted that the war would not have been merely about Czechoslovakia (whose fortress-like position in her rear Germany had cogent reasons for objecting to), nor merely to prevent Germany's economic supremacy throughout Europe, nor merely to preserve our own relative strength in the world, but *in defence of the principle of international law as against the dominance of brute force*—even so there are many who think that a world war would be unjustifiable since it would lead to the destruction of everything valuable, including the principles for which we fought.

Many people, I find, waver when you put that question, or say contrary things not easily reconciled. I have before me Mr. Delisle Burns's admirable and in many ways convincing book, *Civilisation: The Next Step*. He appears to give two answers which depend on two meanings of the word *peace*. "The first necessity of civilised life", he says, on page 163, "is to prevent the weak losing their rights because of their

weakness". But on pages 221 to 223, he says "War, in any case, under modern conditions is disastrous, not merely to the rich and the poor, but to any moral standard which happens to have survived from times of peace". "Any war, however 'just', is morally degrading". And. "Anyone who has any imagination at all can see that any war, even in a 'just' cause, is disastrous".

But in the next paragraph we find that the statement is modified. "The peace which can be secured for any nation by its own armed force is not peace at all in the modern conception. And appeasement, which seems to mean licking the boots of the powerful when they kick the weak, is not peace in any sense at all". And again:

Peace is no longer a matter of sentiment. It is a system of government. If you want that kind of system and work for it, then you can say that you support "peace" and oppose "war". But if you mean only that you do not want to be bombed, or that you love all men as brothers, you are a sentimentalists, of no importance to the advancement of real peace

Finally, Mr. Burns says. "Mere pacifism is not practical politics. It is impossible to base any form of government upon the principle that no resistance ought to be offered to intolerance or oppression".

Mr. Burns denounces war as emphatically as it can be denounced. For him "peace" is a civilised way of life, a system of co-operation which establishes an atmosphere unsuitable for disputes. But even his philosophy seems to indicate that there may come a point when the civilised man must stand up to the barbarian and defend his cause by force.

The dilemma is a real one, and we must suppose Mr. Chamberlain to have faced it. His policy only becomes understandable on the assumption that he has concluded: "World war is the supreme evil; therefore under no circumstances shall Great Britain be led into war". That is how von Ribbentrop understood him, and Hitler, adopting his view, was not deceived. The Chamberlain position is quite intelligible, and may even, from the high civilised

point of view held by extreme pacifists, be right. But in that case, why arm? If you have no intention of ever using your armaments, or letting anyone think that you will use them, why go in for ruinous expenditure on soldiers, airmen, ships, planes and guns? How is it possible to reconcile these apparent opposites—that of showing yourself so emphatically against war as to yield to the point of suffering your rival to double his power, and at the same time continuing to prepare the whole paraphernalia of war? If you never intend to fight, even for the justest of causes, it is folly to put on your armour.

Certainly what we have now is not peace. Peace means security. But there is none. It implies co-operation with other countries. But suspicion and antagonism remain. It implies trust. But there is no trust, or we should not be arming. The question now is whether Mr. Chamberlain is capable of justifying the agreement of Munich by shaping its sequel into the reality of peace. By that agreement, if there is any logic in events, he turned his back on armaments, and staked everything on the possibility of peaceful co-operation with the dictator countries—"peaceful co-operation" meaning not, of course, simply handing over well-governed colonies to the mercy of barbarians, but a settlement in which Hitler and Mussolini were capable of behaving as humanely and unselfishly as Mr. Chamberlain himself. Well, that may be asking too much. If Mr. Chamberlain succeeds in achieving a substantial measure of disarmament, undertakings not to bomb open towns, and a relaxation of the economic war, then we shall admit that the sacrifice at Munich was not for nothing.

I am not counselling disarmament—I am only saying that disarmament is the logical issue of Mr. Chamberlain's policy. Under the circumstances I feel that continued rearmament is at present necessary, because it is not peace which has been secured—not yet. If the Government really means to convince us that it is peace, then surely they should not delay a moment, but instantly follow up Munich with strenuous measures for constructing a peace

system—a system having its roots in the almost universal desire for peace felt by the masses of the people, in Germany no less than in England, a system which should take the form of agreements to forbid for ever the bombing of open cities, to reduce armaments, and substitute economic co-operation for competition. To that end nothing less than a world conference will suffice, including, of course, the United States, and surely also Russia. Preliminary discussions for the exhaustive examination of all the problems would have to precede the conference itself. But invitations to such a conference should be issued forthwith. The psychological moment has come. It is now, before the situation changes again, that such a conference should be called, while the nations are still deeply moved by the imminence of chaos, and the general longing for peace is unmistakable. To turn the present situation to account by starting a constructive co-operative movement for a world peace system is the one and only way by which the Government can justify its claim to have saved us from war.

The moving narrative of Mr. Thielen's short story, *The Dark Continent*, which appears in this number, shows better than any argument how ordinary people—Italians, Germans, Americans, Britons—get on together when left to themselves. The menace of nationalism and armaments is not of their creation. And I turn to another travel work, just published, Mr. J. B. Morton's *Pyrenean*, which, if I were seeking escapist literature, I should find much more satisfying than a detective novel. There was no war in Spain when Mr. Morton (or "Miles Walker") wandered about on foot among the High Pyrenees, now on the French side, now on the Spanish, marvelling at the terror and beauty of the mountains, hobnobbing with all and sundry whom he met, seeking and finding adventure in leisurely movement and casual companionships. I have enjoyed this unambitious book.

1939

JANUARY

"The Boys are at it again!" The exclamation was evoked by the Late Night Final. The expression *Boys*, I should explain, as used in a small group of the younger *intelligentsia*, has two meanings. In its first usage, which would appear to be of feminine origin, it denoted those serious, authoritative, somewhat ponderous writers who deal informatively with public affairs and didactically with literature. (They belong to a man-made world, as understood by Mrs. Virginia Woolf.) In its second and more recent usage it refers to those more boisterous boys who shout a great deal and strut about with flags and uniforms as their background—"pom! pom! pom!"—the gang who follow Dr. Goebbels, Signor Gayda and their august chiefs, blowing their trumpets at the word of command to provide a daily sensation for evening papers.

I think it was the *Boys* who moved an American correspondent to write to me the other day, saying: "It's a lunatic asylum you seem to be living in over there"—*there* indicating the unhappy little continent of Europe. He was thinking of the fantastic, distracting noises that come to us day by day from the Nazi and Fascist propagandists and seem to have no relationship to an intelligent or intelligible world; taunts and menaces poured out in such profusion that no vocabulary is left to meet the case of avowed war. "'Balderdash!' say Nazis, 'we want every Colony'" is the heading we read one day in an evening paper. We turn the page and read of Italians shouting "We want Corsica", and incensed Frenchmen replying "We want Vesuvius"; and so on incessantly.

It is altogether a new sort of mad game the like of which has never been played before. Certainly not among primitive people in other barbarous ages, for the self-protecting instinct of savages makes them as polite as possible to those with whom they do not want to fight. In disordered countries like pre-war Turkey courtesy was the rule, since the alternative was likely to be a violent death. In countries where duelling used to be fashionable there was much punctilio in manners since failing in politeness meant a fight. Until recently the language of diplomacy was always couched in decorous phrases in order that words might not be added to other causes of difference.

But all the traditions of politeness have been thrown overboard in the dictator countries, and a completely new and bewildering technique of international rudeness has taken its place. British statesmen fortunately do not copy it, so the results are curious—it is as if an angry bargee were carrying on an argument with an unruffled B.B.C. announcer.

In the useful series of *Discussion Books* which Messrs. Nelson are issuing is one by Mr. Richard Lambert entitled *Propaganda*. It is informative and suggestive. “*Propaganda*”, Mr. Lambert remarks, “implies the influencing of individuals without regard to their reasoning faculties”. And he goes on: “*Propaganda* is a kind of substitute for tradition. Most ordinary people do not order their lives according to reason, but according to habit . . Remove or interrupt these habits and traditions and they do not revert to a process of pure rationality; they fall victims to another non-rational process of reaching decisions, i.e., *propaganda*”. That is interesting in reference to the dictator countries. Italy, Germany, and also Russia, have abruptly broken with tradition. It is to a people who have thus broken with tradition that the language used by the dictators is addressed.

Dr. Goebbels and his kind may have made a correct estimate concerning the kind of propaganda which will go

down with them. Also, it appears, the dictators up to now have made a correct estimate of the kind of language which will frighten foreign statesmen into submission; that they have succeeded in doing so is, from the German or Italian point of view, the case for the technique they have adopted. But where their propagandists go all wrong is in supposing that this technique can be used all the time in addressing foreigners, whose minds, still under the influence of tradition, are shocked and not always hypnotised by streams of violent words. The language of their propaganda ceases to be skilful in proportion as it becomes ludicrous. It discredits their case. Its palpable irrationality does certainly create fear, but this fear leads to determined efforts for self-defence and armament, which is surely not what the dictators want.

In another book on propaganda, *Propaganda Boom*, Mr. A. J. Mackenzie uses the word in a broader sense than Mr. Lambert, including the influences which appeal to the intelligence as well as to un-reason. In his view dictatorship "consistently under-rates the intelligence of those whom it has to influence". (But in the totalitarian States the counter-influences which appeal to the intelligence have mostly been removed.) In urging the necessity for propaganda for democracy the author points out that the democratic States cannot imitate the methods of the dictators. "They will do their cause no good by dealing in bluster and bluff". They must use more reasonable methods (including armament) to "bring home to the dictators the stark truth that war would be a suicidal gesture".

In Germany, through school and university education, through the Press, radio, films and to some extent even the churches, the ruler is producing the uniform totalitarian citizen. In Germany and Italy (as in Russia) the Government is the State. It would not be surprising if Mr. Chamberlain, face to face with rulers who have the whole machinery of opinion-making at their disposal, should be inclined to envy them this great advantage they possess. He has recently been reminded that in a democracy, in Great

Britain, the interests of the Government of the day are not necessarily the interests of the State, that use of the Official Secrets Acts by the Government may in some cases be an encroachment on liberty and legitimate criticism and contrary to the interests of the State. Mr. Mander has courageously taken up this question in Parliament, and with it the question of Government interference with the Press.

In the December number of the *London Mercury* Mr. Elwyn Jones showed how much reason there is for being on guard against insidious curtailments of liberty, and the National Union of Journalists and the Institute, together representing professional journalism, have been expressing their grave concern, and have asked the Prime Minister to receive a deputation.

To say that these encroachments on liberty of speech and opinion ought to be closely watched is not to suggest that Mr. Chamberlain has deliberately set himself to the task of destroying freedom of speech. But we must recognise that since the state of affairs to-day closely resembles that of war, there is a great temptation to apply some of the controls which would automatically be applied if actual war broke out. It should be admitted that Mr. Chamberlain, in dealing with the dictators, is in some respects at a disadvantage. At critical moments awkward things may appear in the British Press which from his point of view prejudice negotiations. But that is a condition of being ruler in a democracy. When the Government speaks, the people, or a section of the people, will not always say ditto. But when a dictator speaks, the Press speaks with his voice, and the people say nothing at all; what they are thinking we can only guess. Naturally, even in a democracy, a Government will wish to persuade the Press to refrain from embarrassing statements at a critical moment. Such attempts to persuade are only wrong when they are coercive. But since there are so many subtle means of coercion Ministers are bound to come under suspicion if they try to influence the opinions of newspapers. Their proper

function in dealing with the Press is simply to give information—the more the better.

The dictatorships have their propaganda. The democracies need theirs. But they should not imitate the methods of their rivals. Their interests lie in promoting information, in disseminating facts. In their case the truth pays. Our Government will expose itself to vehement attacks if it tries to force its opinions on newspapers; but it has a right, and indeed a duty, to provide information and feed the Press impartially with as much as can safely be divulged, either through a Ministry of Information, or through the separate departments, or both. And I see no reason why a Ministry of Information should not be charged with the duty of disseminating the truth abroad as well as at home. But it should always be remembered that in the long run unadulterated truth is far the best advocate.

FEBRUARY 1939

"Minds fed on this stuff are like bodies whose drink is the froth of the wave and whose meat is the chaff from the granary floor".

Such impressive Biblical utterance is rare in the modern Press. Such admonishing rhetoric has a savour of the prophetic journalism of thirty years ago in which men like Robert Blatchford or C. F. G. Masterman used to stir the emotions of the casual reader. I came upon it the other day in one of the most modern of evening papers—the *Evening Standard*. There was a picture of the writer reclining luxuriously in an armchair, disgustedly holding a book in his hand. I recognised Mr. Howard Spring.

Whose are these emaciated bodies whose drink is the froth of the wave? Reader (if I may adopt this antique form of apostrophe), one of them may be yours! Mr. Howard Spring has his eye on you, so hide the look of guilt and the book you have so recently discarded—that

abomination by Dorothy Sayers, that evanescent trash by Agatha Christie, that diabolical misplaced ingenuity by the famous economist who should know better. Listen to what Mr. Spring is saying. "The mountains of detective novels and of 'thrillers' that industrious and uninspired moles of writers push up year by year are injurious and mentally devitalising to those who read them, because more often than not those who read them read nothing else".

Uneasily, as I read these words, I think of a famous veteran poet who has taken to reading detective novels in bed, and of the head of an Oxford College who has been caught reading *Death in the Tull*, and of an elder statesman, a student of history, who regrets only one thing about Edgar Wallace—that he is no more. Now we begin to understand why there is so little great poetry to-day, or inspired scholarship, or constructive statesmanship—it is because of the "injurious and mentally devitalising" thrillers.

But perhaps Mr. Spring, writing with a keen sense of his responsibility as *Evening Standard* literary adviser, has on this occasion been over-scrupulous. I should like him to be less gentle with novelists in general if he is going to be so severe with the detective novelist. Not that I hold a brief for detective fiction, or that I read very much of it. I admit that I see no particular reason why a corpse should be a necessary ingredient in one's pleasure, and no eagerness for clues would make me want to read a detective novel if it were very badly written or the characters were unlife-like. I confess that if at the start I am asked to memorise a host of minute particulars on which everything may turn, I give up, since I have other uses for my memory, and the murderer will be caught without my help. But there is no reason why we should condemn the whole class because some detective stories are artless and inefficiently made. I need only mention such names as Dorothy Sayers, Anthony Berkeley, R. C. Woodthorpe, Margery Allingham, Michael Innes and Nicholas Blake to have said that much literary skill as well as ingenuity is at the disposal of detective fiction.

I would put Miss Sayers' *The Nine Tailors*, considered as fiction alone, among the five or six best novels produced since the war. But I agree this is not quite to the point, since the pure detective novel, as such, does not aim at being a "novel". It does not aim at subtle character-drawing for its own sake, at touching our sensibility through the finer issues of circumstance, at revealing tracts of social life for our understanding, or carrying us to any conclusion except the discovery of the murderer. Our emotions and subtler perceptions are not involved. In a detective story we are simply asked to join in a game—that of hunting the criminal—a game with its own established rules. The author will refrain from enlisting our sympathy too warmly on behalf either of the corpse or the murderer; the clues must be honestly given; the trail must be laid as conscientiously as the paper track in a paper-chase. The hunt is as innocent and as unimportant as the solution of a cross-word puzzle. It may or may not be boring, but as a mere distraction it is no more harmful than those more or less intellectual parlour games at which so many leaders of literary society are adepts.

The detective novel, generally speaking, is for distraction only. Therefore—if we put aside unrepresentative examples like *The Nine Tailors*—it does not belong to fine art, which exists, not negatively for distraction, but positively for æsthetic satisfaction. Apart from the thrill of excitement in the chase, it touches no emotion; it does not stir one's sensibility to any realisation of beauty or stand on its merits as a criticism of life. From having read it, one is æsthetically no richer at the end. Nothing has been gained but relaxation, the whiling away of time and temporary oblivion of the stress of the world. But if nothing beyond this has been gained, it is also true that nothing has been lost; the reader has at least not been led astray by meretricious appeals to his mind and imagination, to false valuations of life or morbid emotionalism.

I would ask Mr. Howard Spring, who is an experienced reviewer of novels, whether he can say as much about most

of the ordinary books of fiction which fall into his hands. Would he not agree that of the two thousand-odd new novels published every year there are a few only which can justly claim to be works of art, very many which make no claim to be works of art, and between these probably a still larger number, which do make their claim, which receive lavish praise in certain journals, but are machine-made, mediocre or worse? In how many of these works is not the love emotion falsified and given a spurious glamour? In how many, posing as "historical novels", is not some ready-made theme palmed off on us with romantical description and puppet characters disguised behind period conversation and antique costume and setting? And what about the pretentious imitators of Henry James or Virginia Woolf whose mannerisms conceal poverty of original thought or observation, or those who affect "tough-guy" violence or obscenity to create the impression of virility and strength? Granted that there is much careful study among mediocre novelists of the craft of fiction as taught by Mr. Percy Lubbock, and much imitation of the technique of accredited masters, to what extent is this reputable work a positive addition to the fine art of literature, or capable of giving us genuine aesthetic experience?

The pretentious in all its forms is positively injurious. Sloppy sentiment, false emotionalism cannot be enjoyed without a "mentally devitalising" effect on readers. Spurious appeals to the sense of beauty tend to create false valuations of life. Would not critics be better employed in exposing these frauds, which are harmful, than in flagellating the innocent detective novels, most of which are harmless?

It is disturbing to read in the January number of *The Criterion* that "publication ceases with the present issue". For sixteen years under the editorship of Mr. T. S. Eliot that journal has been serving the cause of literature and art by disinterested and competent criticism and by its

fearlessness in publishing what the Editor thought ought to be published. Issued quarterly at the price of 7s. 6d. (for a short period it was published monthly), it probably did not command a very large sale, but its influence went far beyond the circle of its subscribers; it played a distinctive part in its contribution to culture.

It reflected the essentially critical side of Mr. Eliot's mind. Mr. Eliot as a poet has produced work whose unconventional form has established him in the minds of his imitators as a revolutionary, the arch-innovator of post-war years. But underneath even his poetry there is an element of ingrained conservatism which is much more apparent in his staid, severe, straightforward critical work. He has been a persuasive exponent of that classicism in the light of which progress informed by tradition carries the burden of all that is past into the renewed and renewing life of the present. He has two rare qualifications for a critic. For all his classicism, he is just enough of a romantic to be a thinker for whom awareness of first and last things provides an indispensable background for profitable criticism. Secondly, the expanse of his knowledge and his explorations in foreign literature have enriched his judgments. In *The Criterion* he endeavoured to provide a "local forum of international thought", and published much work by foreign writers.

Mr. Eliot tells us that during the autumn the prospects of war had involved him "in hurried plans for suspending publication". "In the subsequent détente", he adds, "I became convinced that my enthusiasm for continuing the editorial work did not exist". And again: "In the present state of public affairs—which had induced in myself a depression of spirits so different from any other experience of fifty years as to be a new emotion—I no longer feel the enthusiasm necessary to make a literary review what it should be". These are melancholy words—Mr. Eliot discovering in himself some of the symptoms of an ailment which has been sterilising life and letters throughout Europe as well as in England, so that his task is now doubly

difficult, what with a dearth of vital ideas around him, and lack of inclination on his own part to search for them. Throughout his editorship of *The Criterion* he has steadily endeavoured to maintain "literary standards", which now he finds "increasingly repudiated in the modern world", and he is left wondering "whether it would not have been more profitable to have endeavoured to rally intellectual effort to affirm those principles of life and policy from the lack of which we are suffering".

Perhaps that is what he would have done if he had gone on with *The Criterion*. It is true at all times that literature cannot be separated from the vital ideas which are associated with all the activities of life and provide the nourishment of art. Literature is not a pursuit absolutely *sui generis*, subsisting apart from the rest of life. It springs from it, is a part of it, and is its fine spirit. If it appears to languish, and the world becomes preoccupied with the practical rather than the contemplative, it is all the more imperative that there should be clear understanding of the direction in which we are going; and such understanding, carrying us into the world of ideas, presents a fresh starting-point for the contemplative activity out of which literature and art again must come. I deeply regret the disappearance of *The Criterion*. Though its editor will go on making his individual contributions to letters, we can ill afford to lose one of those centres of ideas where the lamp of thought and imagination has been so sedulously trimmed.

THE FAREWELL TO YEATS

All who saw W. B. Yeats from time to time in his last year of life agree that his was a splendid ending, the masterly conclusion to a life filled with poetry and poetic living from early manhood to the end. No flagging in his mental power, no poetic repetition, but a constant passing on from one phase of imaginative excitement to another.

The poems that have been published in this journal in March, April, and December of last year, and in January of this year and in the present number, are examples of his greatest work in which fancy and imagination are joined, but with a grittiness of wisdom and experience beyond his reach in the most beautiful of his early poems. Even in his youth he had often harped upon the theme of old age, finding in old men and old women a link with the life of our ancestors and with a world approaching. He had long been conscious of old age coming on in himself, but without dismay—none of that wistful regret which Wordsworth had when he could only *remember* his experience

Of splendour in the grass, of glory in the flower

On the contrary, he was still confident of his undiminished spiritual and perceptive power. Ten years ago when he had been scoffing at

this caricature,
Decrepit age that has been tied to me
As to a dog's tail,

he goes on :

Never had I more
Excited, passionate, fantastical
Imagination, nor an ear and eye
That more expected the impossible

And in his last year he was justly writing of his “old man’s eagle mind”, and testifying—

When a man grows old his joy
Grows more deep day after day

When I first met him (before the War) he was already abundantly recognised as the representative poet of Ireland and the leader of the Irish literary movement out of which had grown the Gaelic League and Sinn Fein. The Abbey Theatre under his inspiration had come into being, achieving its twofold object of being distinctively Irish, and of presenting drama of an unquestionably high order. By this time he was something more than the melodious poet of the “Celtic Twilight”, or the oracle of

the Irish literary revival—already he and his friends had been put to the practical test of the theatre and had passed with honours

On the evening I am speaking of it was John Masefield who took me along to his rooms in Woburn Buildings, where we found a small company gathered, Lady Gregory, Mr. (now Sir) William Rothenstein, Yeats himself and, I think, two others. I had recently written a probably too youthfully confident article about the Irish movement, but Lady Gregory let me off lightly by at once remarking pleasantly that she had seen I had just been criticising them all; and taking up some small point I had made, she set a ball of talk rolling. For a little time, in the dimly lighted room, she seated on the right of the fire, Yeats on the left, the two took up the conversation and held it, advancing and retreating like a chorus in strophe and antistrophe, he in rounded, eloquent sentences, she very quietly and incisively; till she withdrew and sat in silence, while he went on to speak at length of the forces of Gods and Fighting-men and to praise the genius of Lady Gregory. On the subject of journalism he made the—for him—astonishing remark that it would be good for every young poet to submit himself for a year or two to the discipline of journalism. At midnight, when we were all about to go, he asked me to stay a little longer, as he had something he would like to read to me; and I well remember the thrill of that early morning hour when, strangely mingling the human and the fay, he chanted his poems and expounded his theory of the speaking of verse.

I met him again several times in the course of the next year or two—once at an odd party given to literary people and politicians at Stafford House, and again at a little restaurant in Soho; and another time I walked half-way across London with him in the small hours of the morning while he talked of the fascination and the danger to the poet of abstract ideas—his mind was increasingly turning at that moment, he said, to the Elizabethans, meaning that he himself was in no such danger.

During the last year or two of his life I met him frequently. Once he turned up quite suddenly at my home in London to tell me about a gifted, erratic poet whose work interested him. Often, too, I was with him at Steyning, where he used to stay at the house of the Misses Heald, and composed many of the best of his latest poems. And last autumn, on his way from Oxford to Sussex, he stopped at my cottage in Berkshire to lunch, and read some of his most recent compositions. Indeed the last year was both poetically and intellectually as productive as any in his life. He had to spend much time resting. He got easily excited, and one was told that intellectual excitement exhausted him. But none the less it was his life. His interests were extraordinarily wide. In some ways he was far more practical than he had been in earlier years. He told amusing stories about people with animation and gusto. He followed the major issues in international politics much more closely than once he had done. He read all the younger poets with scrupulous care, and he would often ask to hear more about this or that young poet whose work had appeared in *The London Mercury*; and sometimes in attempting to make generous allowances for work which stood at the opposite pole from his own he was inclined to over-praise—just as, about fifteen or twenty years ago, he conspicuously over-praised one or two poets then in vogue whose artifice he would have seen through at once had they been attempting a style and technique less remote from his own.

Latterly he talked much about eugenics. One would not have expected him to urge a biological remedy for the improvement of the human race; but he was impressed by the power given by the stupid to the mediocre, and the mass-production of mediocrity, and had been listening eagerly to the arguments for biological selection. The Italians and the Germans were concentrating on sheer numbers; let us think only of the *quality* of the race. I think it was for the same reason that he favoured what he was constantly talking of as the “unification” of the State, under an aristocratic order capable of guiding society out

of the dangers of herd thought. He was not easy to follow when he got off on one of those topics, nor easily to be diverted. Conversation became most difficult when he was discoursing about his familiar spirits. He so much took for granted the existence of his spirits, and so much assumed that you, as an intelligent person, accepted his evidence, that it would have been unprofitable to question his premises. Some of his psychical stories were simple and striking, but often they became wrapt in the mystical language he had evolved in the course of his speculations about Blake, Swedenborg, Blavatsky and a host of greater and lesser mystics.

He continued to read omnivorously—new books as well as old—and he did not despise a detective story. He was interested in the idea of the King's Medal for Poetry. When the time for making a second award was long past, he asked me why the judges had done nothing about it, and at his suggestion I wrote some comments on the subject in *The London Mercury*. The sequel was that an award was soon made—to W. H. Auden. He thought the choice a right one.

Yeats was much given to theoretical speculation, but neither in his youth nor in his old age did he ever confuse the functions of theorist and poet. (Occasionally he came to grief in his middle period.) Instinctively at the beginning he knew that the function of the poet is "to move"—later his judgment confirmed the instinct. "To me", he said one day last summer, "it is a fundamental defect in modern art that it too much provokes to thought; classical art engenders feeling". For that reason he thought Ibsen a sign of decadence, and Shaw, of course, more so. You could theorise about art, but art should never begin in theory—it will begin with the thing seen and felt, the dream, the poetical facts. That he himself from first to last was immensely influenced by William Blake is perfectly consistent with this view of poetry, and I think he would have argued that Blake's own poetry was, in the main, consistent with it. There were "heart mysteries" in the stories of

Cuchullain and the Countess Cathleen, but in the plays as he wrote them:

Players and painted stage took all my love
And not those things that they were emblemis of

Having put down these few disjointed notes about this great poet—whose life and work had in it so little that was disjointed, but developed from phase to phase, according to the laws of its own dramatic unity, and closed with so powerful a dénouement—I hand on the tale to two of Yeats' friends who have more right to speak of him than I—H. W. Nevinson and J. M. Hone.

APRIL 1939

In his "Last Words", announcing the end of his magazine, *The Criterion*, three months ago, Mr. T. S. Eliot spoke almost despairingly of the condition of literature to-day and the condition of society of which it was a symptom. Behind what he calls "literary symptoms of decline" he sees something which goes much deeper, the demoralisation of society as a whole; he fears that the culture of the world is in danger and that its "continuity may have to be maintained by a very small number of people indeed". Similarly, the French author, M. Georges Duhamel, from whose book, *In Defence of Letters*, I quoted last July, suggests that "civilised activities seem to be operating temporarily so as to suspend the progress of civilisation itself and divert it into other channels"—perhaps towards the films, the radio, the picture paper, games—and that civilisation has been producing a variety of contrivances which "spare the mass of people that intellectual effort which is the only measure of true culture".

But perhaps our fears arising from the persecution of artists abroad and the repercussions here, or our disappointment arising from the democratisation and consequent temporary lowering of artistic values, do not justify us in a wholly pessimistic outlook for the future. The problem

is how to get safely through the perilous period of transition. As I see it, culture, which includes the whole-hearted pursuit of all the finer elements in life which have value for the spirit, is suffering a setback to-day from two causes. The first arises from the social and intellectual upheaval which is occurring dramatically before our eyes and appears in the conflict between Fascism and Democracy, between authority and freedom, between mechanical efficiency and the disorder of *laissez-faire*. That, with its economic disequilibrium, its wasteful concentration on war, has absorbed the more serious thought of this generation and compelled it to attend too exclusively to the severely practical issues of how to survive—how to avert war or hunger. This—how obvious it is!—is not an atmosphere favourable to the arts or the cultivation of the spirit.

The second cause of the slump in the finer arts must be attributed to the democratisation of culture and the mass-production of books, papers, films, etc., which stimulate or drug the popular mind. I am not optimistic enough to suppose that the crude artistic tastes of the masses can be transformed very quickly, though the effect of improving education will gradually produce results. In the meantime a certain levelling process is going on which, while it levels up from the lower planes, tends also to level down from the higher planes. Much talent that belongs naturally to the latter is diverted from its course by the economic gain of catering for the masses. The necessity of speaking the language which is intelligible to the million imposes some sacrifice in choiceness—it demands a sort of flatness of surface from which all the little fine uneven points revealed by close analysis or exactness of perception are shorn off or ignored. It is unprofitable to anything except the intellectual conscience to pay attention to those intellectual or aesthetic *minutiae*, though in those *minutiae* may lie just the difference between truth and falsehood, an accurate shot at eternity or a miss.